

橘公司

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19

渚
トゥルーエンド

True End MIO

SpiritNo.0

AstralDress-DeusType

Weapon-ThroneType[Ain Soph Aur]

TreeType[Ain Soph]

SeedType[Ain]

DATE

LIVE

A

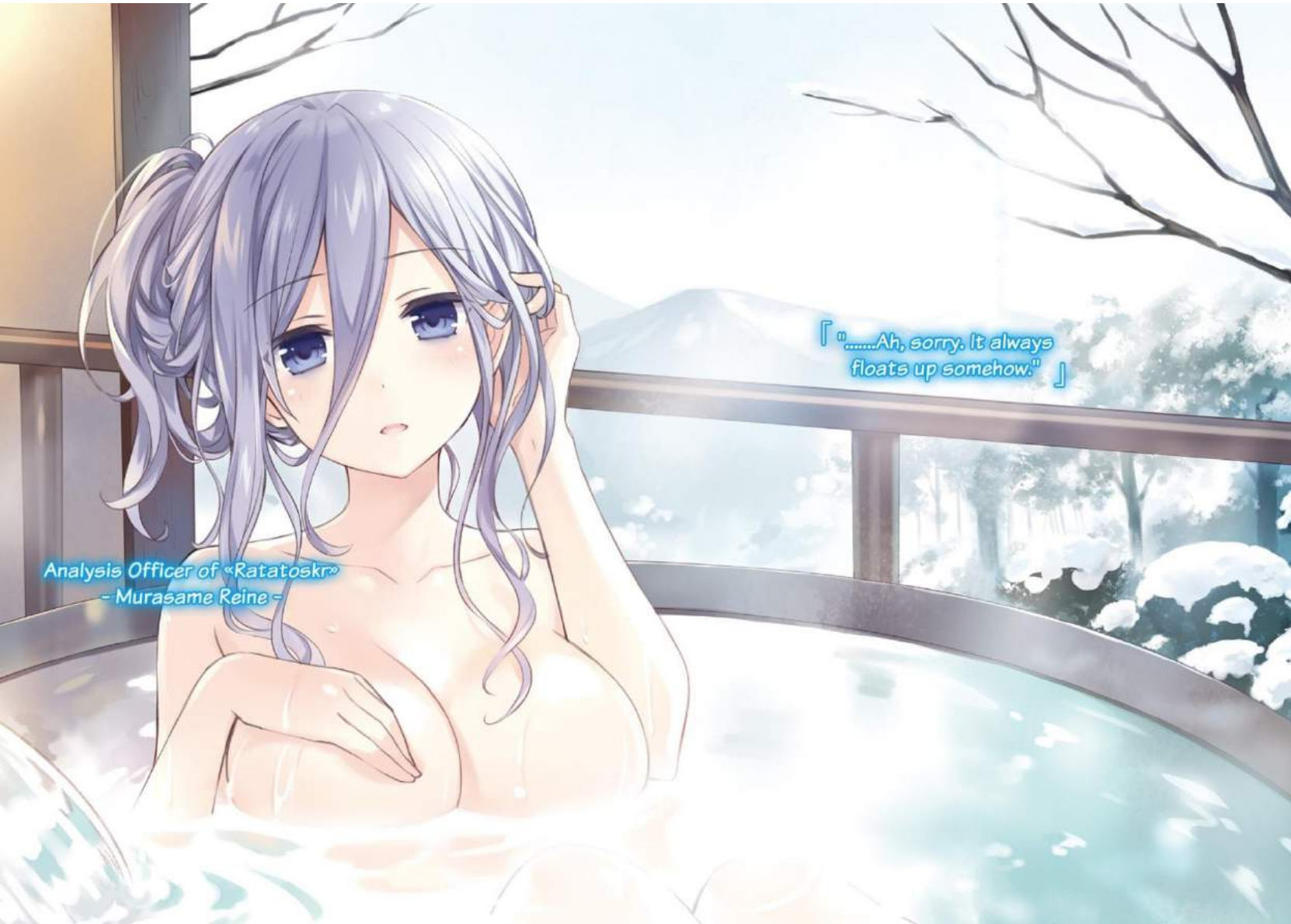


ファンタジア文庫

DATE A LIVE True End MIO

デート・ア・ライブ 19 滯トウルルーエンド





「.....Ah, sorry. It always
floats up somehow.」

Analysis Officer of «Ratatoskr»
- Murasame Reine -



「If you're talking
about "siblings
getting along"
aren't you
forgetting about
one person?"」

Commander of «Ratatoskr»
- Itsuka Kotori -

「Let me tell you that this was
the worst possible choice.」

High school student
- Itsuka Shidou -

「I'll show you the
power of siblings.」

Shidou's little sister
- Takamiya Mana -

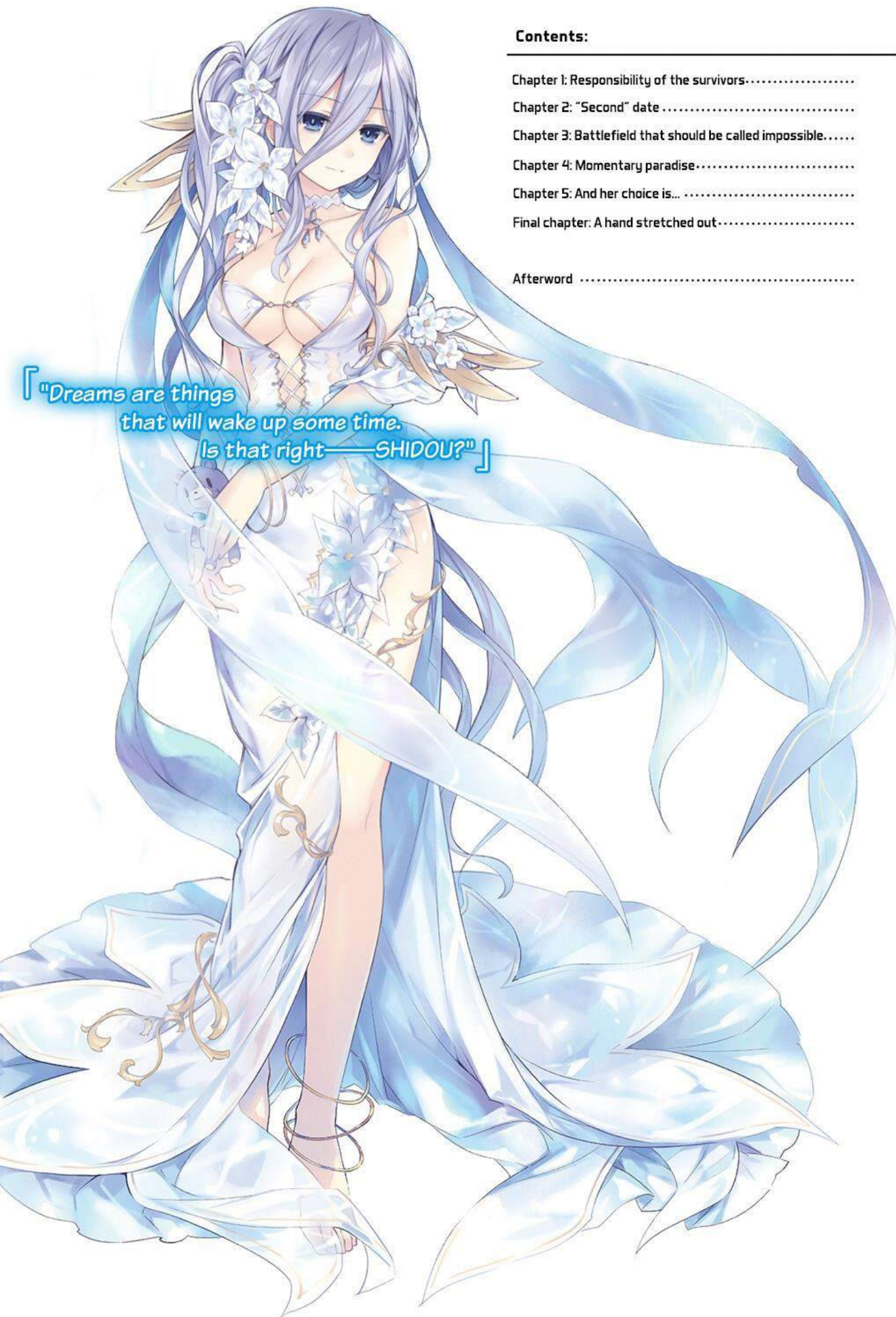


「If you like it, then
there's nothing better.」

「I feel—really very
comfortable.」

「.....It's almost
like a mirror.」

「We..... rarely walk
together right?」



「Dreams are things
that will wake up some time.
Is that right——SHIDOU?」

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精霊

THE SPIRIT

隣界に存在する特殊災害指定生命体。発生原因、存在理由ともに不明。
こちらの世界に現れる際、空間震を発生させ、周囲に甚大な被害を及ぼす。
また、その戦闘能力は強大。

対処法1

WAYS OF COPING 1

武力を以てこれを殲滅する。
ただし前述の通り、非常に高い戦闘能力を持つため、達成は困難。

対処法2

WAYS OF COPING 2

——デートして、デレさせる。

澪トウルーエンド

True End MIO

SpiritNo.0

AstralDress-DeusType

Weapon-FlowerType[Ain Soph Aur] TreeType[Ain Soph] SeedType[Ain]

Chapter 1: Responsibility of the Survivors

“Reine-san ——do you want to go on a date with me tomorrow?”

Above Tengu City, at an altitude of 15,000 meters.

Onboard the large aircraft <Fraxinus> floating there, Itsuka Shidou had made up his mind to issue those words.

Standing in front of him was a woman looking around 20 years of age and wearing the military uniform for <Ratatoskr>. Her hair was slovenly tied together, with pale skin and thick shadows decorating underneath her eyes——

If listing only those features, one might think that she was sick person inflicted with an incurable disease. But even when taking that into account, she was still breathtakingly beautiful. Her symmetrical nose bridge and the somewhat sorrowful look traced onto that pair of eyes. Rather, even the aforementioned features felt like contributing a role in fostering her phantasmal atmosphere.

——Murasame Reine.

The Analytic Officer of <Ratatoskr>, the organization designed to protect Spirits, as well as the assistant homeroom teacher of Shidou’s classroom.

And——the Spirit of Origin that had become the source of all other Spirits, Mio Takamiya.

Yes. Starting from now, in about 30 hours, she will be the Spirit that would massacre all of the other Spirits.

“.....”

While listening to what Shidou had said, Reine gaze down at him while slightly narrowing her eyes.

“That really surprised me, why did you say something like that so suddenly, Shin?”

Then, after a while, with an appearance that didn’t look too shocked, she replied back in a quiet voice.

Neither acceptance nor refusal. Perhaps, she was aiming to measure Shidou’s intentions.

But it seemed to be impossible. Although they had a close relationship——no, for that reason——if someone had suddenly said such a thing, it would be normal to be surprised. Conversely, if Shidou were standing in Reine’s position, he would have likely said something familiar. However, for Reine right now, such sentiments were likely not the only emotions stirring in her chest. Shidou looked back at Reine’s gaze and pondered these thoughts over. Then, he swallowed in a small gulp before replying back in the process.

“Is it no good? Tomorrow——no the date has changed, so it’s precisely today, but there should still be a whole day before DEM’s assault.”

“Although that is the case, there is no need for training beforehand. Rest well or do something you like——”

“I’m not training.”

“.....”

As Shidou spoke out to interrupt her words, Reine fell silent as she averted her eyes for a moment. Rather than being unable to continue looking at Shidou, it seemed she was looking to see if anyone was around.

“.....This isn’t the place to tell a joke. Shin, won’t you feel worried being seen by someone?”

“I didn’t say that as a joke. ——Reine-san, you just told me to do something that I liked. So that’s why I’ve invited you on a date before the facing the decisive battle.”

“.....”

Hearing what Shidou had said, Reine fell silent once again.

“.....Does everyone know?”

“Of course, I haven’t told anyone. This is a secret date from everyone else.”

“.....For a moment, can I ask you? Why are you inviting me?”

“Do you not want to?”

“I haven’t said that, but if you wanted to go on a date, then there should be someone else. Everyone will be pleased if you offer.”

“Well then, it’s hopeless. Right now, I want to go on a date with Reine-san.”

“.....”

Three times, there was silence.

After a moment of thinking it over, Reine let out a small sigh.

“How unfair, you.”

“Eh.....?”

“When you say it like that, is there still any room for refusal?”

“! Then——”

As Shidou's eyes perked up, he saw Reine give a small nod back.

".....Time to leave. When should I head out?"

"Thank you.....! Well then, tomorrow morning, I'll meet you in front of Tenguu station at 10 o'clock."

".....I understand.....please excuse me now. If I don't finish up the remainder of my work, Kotori will get angry."

Shidou swayed his shoulders back. After hearing Reine's reply, he finally recognized the insanity of his behavior in asking for a date in the middle of the night before the appointed day.

No, to be precise, that method of rash thinking was completely unimaginable. It's just that Shidou had no extra energy to afford worrying about this just a moment ago.No, but now that there was space now, he couldn't help but shake his head back uncontrollably.

"Sorry to have suddenly made such a request."

"It's fine. Seeing your position, it's not something that should be said out loud, but I'm really happy to have received your invitation. ——Having said that, it's still very difficult to get Kotori's consent."

"Ha...haha....."

With a wry smile, Shidou wiped away the sweat covering his forehead. Reine lightly waved her hand back as she walked into the <Fraxinus> corridor.

Soon afterwards, Reine's figure turned around the corridor and completely disappeared.

"Fuwa——"

After confirming it for a moment, Shidou took a huge breath in as if entire face had been completely submerged underwater.

His back was soaked with sweat as his fingertips were trembling slightly. The extreme tension, vigor, and resolution pushing his body forward as momentum had spewed out all at once.

With his feet staggering, Shidou placed his back against the wall of the hallway before squatting down onto the floor.

"For the time being, this was breaking through the first barrier, right?"

Then, he muttered with a voice that nobody else could hear.

For now, he had succeeded in inviting Reine to a date. Of course, while keeping this in mind as the real hurdle begins, Shidou still couldn't let out a sigh of relief yet.

After all, the first success was predictable to some extent.

Reine couldn't refuse Shidou——no, it was impossible for Mio to refuse Shin's invitation. Shidou also recognized that fact.

For this reason, Shidou was able to forcibly obtain consent for the date despite being self-aware of the rude timing in asking.

“.....”

However, Shidou patted down his cheeks with both hands to relight his fighting spirit.

Before tomorrow's date (war), there was still something that needed to be done beforehand.

The opponent was the Spirit of Origin. One might feel at ease if there was an existence capable of surpassing her, but such things did not exist. Yet within this limited time, it was necessary to overcome her with his own hands.

However, the question raised was how to proceed smoothly. In even the slightest chance that Shidou's intentions be captured by Reine's intuition, the plan would collapse instantly. Then, everything would revert back to the initial situation——

“Yes——that should be done first.”

After that momentary thought, Shidou forced his legs to stand up again from that spot.

Then, while walking though the corridor, he step into the men's restroom onboard <Fraxinus>.

While there are countless cameras and microphones installed in the ship, no matter what, there shouldn't be recording devices in the restroom. Here, nothing would be recorded unless one spoke to loudly and the feedback was caught from the outside.

After locking the door to the stall, Shidou took out his smart phone from his pocket and tapped on the icon labeled as 'M'.

Then, the five letters writing out the name 'MARIA', were displayed on the screen as a familiar voice was heard from the speaker.

“——Confirmation for application launch. How may I be of assistance?”

The voice of the girl chiming though the smart phone was the exact same as that of Maria, the management AI of the Fraxinus airship that Shidou was onboard right now.

That's right. Within his smartphone, there was an application installed (Shido was unaware of when) that allowed for direct communication with Maria. With this, it was possible to communicate with Maria without passing through the equipment inside the ship.

“I have something I need to tell you, Maria.”

“What happened? To invite your female classroom teacher on a date the day before the decisive battle, Itsuka · Immoral · Shidou.”

“.....”

Hearing that said in a somewhat sullen colored voice, Shidou fell silent without even having to think.

.....It seemed that the prior conversation had been recorded. Certainly if only that scene were taken into context, it's no wonder to be baffled at such a matter.

“No, that.....Maria.”

“No, no I don't intend to blame you. Perhaps, the next battlefield will be the largest yet. Since it's also possible that Shidou could die, it's not a bad idea to solve the issue of the future. Moreover, it's the instinct of every creature to retain its own species when life is threatened. It is also a good choice to select Reine as your first partner. Surely, you'll receive a gentle first-time induction. I didn't know that Shidou likes them more mature for himself. Can you tell me the specific points that were the deciding factor for future reference? Is it a sense of broad-mindedness? Is it her breasts? A sense of security? Breasts? Or is it still because of breasts? Tch.”

“M-Maria?”

“Although it is big, it's only 95 cm at best. The portion of my chest extending out from my warship (body) exceeds 250 m.”

“The portion of your chest extending out!?No wait, listen to my story first.....!”

As Shido made an earnest appeal, Maria finally grew silent to encourage him to speak.

“Listen, Maria. You may not believe what I say next, but please listen calmly. I've traveled back from 30 hours from now—from February 20th. No, to be more exact, only my consciousness from February 20th has returned to my current body.”

“Hō.”

Hearing what Shidou had said, Maria, not laughing or too amazed, calmly replied back.

“Because you used Kurumi's <Zafkiel> to return back to the present?”

“Ahh, yes. You understanding it so quickly helps a lot.”

“Analyzing from previous cases, I thought that this might be it——of course, this is excluding the possibility that Shidou is making up a desperately magnificent excuse to cover up his secret date with Reine.”

“H-hey, you.....”

“Just kidding. Humor is cushioning material for your mind. Even when backed into a corner, I'd like you to have enough room left to still take in jokes.”

“.....Then I'll do my best.”

Shidou let out a wry smile.truly, she was an artificial intelligence that can be relied upon at any time. Although he had intended Maria to be the first person to discuss this situation due to her role in managing and controlling information onboard, he did not expect to receive such encouragement.

“——Anyway, let's continue on. Please rest assured this conversation won't be in the record. Why else bother choosing such a place, wasn't that the reason?”

“Ah.....”

After Shidou deeply nodded, he began to explain.

——During the battle against DEM, the Spirit of Origin ▪ Mio had appeared after piercing through Kurumi's chest.

Reine being a provisional appearance for Mio.

The Spirits defeated one after the other, their Sephira Crystals snatched away.

Even Tohka, who had taken in a portion of Mio's power, was erased.

And so, using the Sixth Bullet <Vav> sealed within his body, he had returned back to the night before the decisive battle.

“.....I see.”

After Shidou completed his explanation, Maria said that while accompanied by a thin breathtaking sound. Of course, an AI doesn't need to breathe, but there was still finely minuscule patterns projected in her speech.

“I understand the situation——Shidou.”

“W-what's the matter?”

“Well, it's great to see you're still alive.”

“.....”

Hearing Maria's brief words, tears unconsciously began to leak from his eyes. However, he couldn't stop to cry at a place like this. While wiping his tears with his sleeve, he worked hard to show Maria that he had recovered.

“Yes, thanks to everyone's efforts.”

“I agree. Everyone worked really hard.”

As she said that, Maria continued speaking as if having thought of something.

“——Now, if that's the case, I'll have to prepare for tomorrow.

—First, let's go to Kotori for assistance. I'll contact her so please head to Kotori's office first. The details will be given there."

"Ah, that's right. First of all.....I'll have to inform Kotori."

Shidou spilled out those words with heavy look marking his face.

Itsuka Kotori, the commander of <Ratatoskr> and Shidou's younger sister. If <Ratatoskr> wanted to be involved in any operation, then her assistance was indispensable.

However, Kotori had a close relationship with the aforementioned Reine. It was a close enough relationship that she was considered to be her best friend. Honestly, it hurt his heart that he must tell the truth to Kotori.

"Yes. Although it will be painful, it is also essential. —Even if it's Reine, it'll be no problem. I'll edit the corresponding conversation logs and images inside the ship. But since Reine is also within <Fraxinus>, that alone cannot afford complete security. Please be careful to keep your volume low so that others won't be able to hear in."

"Alright, I understand. Is it okay to talk in the office?"

"Yes, it would be less risky to let you return home to talk, but it would look unnatural for Kotori leave the ship in the current situation. In order to minimize Reine's suspicions, we should hold the conversation here."

"I see, alright I'll head out first."

"Yes. —However, because there will be no records left behind, it'll be difficult to cling onto the chair in Kotori's room and resist the smell of her newly taken off stockings."

"Hey, hey....."

As Shidou spoke out, he remembered what Maria had just said before.

"That's a pity. I would have liked that as much as my favorite kissing cup."

"Fufu—well you've certainly tried to make a good performance."

Maria delightfully laughed as Shidou tightened his shoulders from his forced routine.



"Muu.....I woke up."

While walking through a corridor of <Fraxinus>, Tohka let out a small "Mmm....." sound as she lightly stretched. In line with that movement, her long night-colored hair slightly swayed

It was already late enough for time to reset back to zero again. For Tohka who had always gone to bed early, it was quite late in the evening to still be up.

Nevertheless, it wasn't because Tohka liked wandering around the ship. Originally, she was sleeping in the same room as the other Spirits. But she was woken up shocked seeing Miku sleeping next to her and had no choice but head to the lounge room of the ship to get something warm to drink.

However, there was an unexpected person in the lounge room. —Shidou.

No, there was nothing unusual with Shidou being there. While the encounter was certainly surprising, it would be better to say that even remembering the accidental encounter made Tohka feel very joyful.

However, after Shidou confirmed Tohka's appearance, he suddenly was overcome by emotion and suddenly embraced her before saying something strange.

"A.....dream."

Tohka recalled the sensation of the hug, the feeling of holding his shoulders with his own hands, and the words that he spilled out to her at the same time.

That's right. Shidou had said that he had a bad dream. —A dream where everyone will get killed in the battle tomorrow.

That must have been a terrifyingly dreadful dream to have frightened Shidou that much. If Tohka had seen the same dream, she would have likely jump out of bed, soaking her pillow in tears.

But——no, that was why.

"....."

Tohka had injected even more strength into her hands holding onto his shoulders.

"As for that dream, I will never let those things happen."

As if to make this determination boil inside her body, Tohka strongly uttered that.

According to Shidou, the Tohka in his dream worked furiously hard to protect Shidou. —To become an existence like that in his dreams was something to be proud of.

Then she mustn't lose to herself from the dream. Tohka let out a small "alright" for the purpose of raising her spirits before briskly pacing herself to go back to sleep.

What needed to be done today for the upcoming battle is to get sufficient rest. First of all, she should get a steady amount of sleep tonight——

However.

“.....Muu?”

While returning back to the room to take a nap, Tohka pursed her eyebrows up in astonishment.

But that was to be expected as well. There were two petite girls standing near the vicinity of the entrance.

One girl was wearing a rabbit puppet on her left hand. The other was a girl with long hair tied up that seemed still extensive enough to reach the ground. —They were Spirits that should have been sleeping in the same room as Tohka: Yoshino and Mukuro. But now, both of them had their eyes wide open, staring back at the room with a shudder.

“What are you doing, Yoshino, Mukuro?”

“.....! Tohka-san!”

“Oh, so you’re safe.”

“Yeah, I thought you were already eaten.”

As Tohka asked, Yoshino, Mukuro, and the rabbit puppet Yoshinon, while still trembling, were surprised for a moment before out a sigh of relief as they confirmed Tohka’s appearance.

“.....? Did something happen?”

“A-actually.....”

Following Tohka’s question, Yoshino fearfully pointed back to the room.

“Mu.....?”

While looking at the direction indicated by Yoshino’s fingertips, Tohka found something in the depths of the room where the lights were off.

Finally, as her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, Tohka noticed it. It was——

“A-ahhhhh...”

Lying on the floor, Natsumi let out a weak voice from her throat.

“Chew....., chew.....”

It was the appearance of Miku letting out an “hmmm....” sound while sucking on Natsumi’s innocent belly.

“Wha.....what is this...”

Looking at the contextless scene front of her eyes, confusion struck Tohka’s expression. Short afterwards, as if matching Tohka’s gaze, Miku turned her body, causing Natsumi to leak out a painful “Gwaaaaah....!” groan.

“N-Natsumi-san.....!”

“R-run away Yoshino.....while she’s still targeting me.....if you don’t escape, I wouldn’t be able to keep her.....”

“That, I can’t escape and leave Natsumi-san behind.....!”

As Natsumi and Yoshino were passionately exchanging those words, Tohka felt a cold sweat drip down her cheek as she turned her attention to Miku, who had completely transformed into a monster.

“Miku, what are you doing! Let go of Natsumi!”

“Tis in vain, Tohka. Look closer.”

“What.....?”

Listening to what Mukuro had said, Tohka carefully observed Miku again.

For some reason, Miku had closed her eyes and was mumbling something incomprehensible in her sleep.

“Hmm.....huh.....can you really give everything to me.....? My stomach is getting full.....”

Seeing her look like this, Tohka felt a shudder open her eyes widely.

“No.....! No way Miku——”

“Mun.....although unbelievable, Miku is still asleep. That is to say——this is her sleepwalking posture!”

Mukuro shouted while pointing at Miku. Then, as if hearing her name being called, Miku squirmed her limbs around and began crawling like a worm.

“Hmm.....fu.....”

“Gya—————!”

“Natsumi-san!”

“Uwaah, how passionate.”

“Truly a headache.....Natsumi’s vitality is being snatched by Miku.”

As Natsumi screamed, Yoshino, Yoshinon, and Mukuro raised a helpless voice.

“Mu.....”

Looking on at this scene, Tohka made up her mind. After nodding and placing her hands on Yoshino and Mukuro’s shoulders, she stepped her feet into the room.

“! Tohka-san.....?”

“It’s too dangerous, Tohka. Although still asleep, her nose is still effective. If you draw too close, you’ll be repeating Natsumi’s mistakes all over again.”

“It’s okay. ——I’ve learned how to deal with these problems from Nia before. Leave it to me.”

Tohka said as she nodded vigorously. Then, she took off a stocking under her feet, grabbed the edge of it, and started swinging and whistling.

"Now, now, come back to the forest, Miku. Ru——rururu——"

“.....!”

The moment after, as if noticing this, Miku raised her face.



And then, Miku's mouth left Natsumi's stomach, she began to crawl on the floor as if drawn to Tohka's stocking.

“.....Su.....su.”

“—Take this!”

As soon as Miku was close enough, Tohka threw her stocking at the wall.

“.....!”

Then, Miku made a leap forward chasing after it—

“—Ahyu!?”

In this manner, the dull sound of slamming against the wall resounded.

“Ha.....!? T-this is.....”

Having ploughed her face into the wall, Miku snapped back to reality as her eyes jolted open.

It seemed that she was finally awake. While rubbing the bruise on her forehead from the collision just now, Miku began to look around.

After confirming that Miku was awake now, Yoshino and Mukuro breathed out a collective sigh of relief as they ran towards Natsumi.

“Natsumi-san, are you alright?”

“S-somehow.....”

“Mun.....the stomach has been attached to an octopus sucker.....”

While using the hands of those two for support, Natsumi began to stand up.

Then, Miku, gazing on at this scene, let out a “Kya!?” in a startled voice.

“What happened to you, Natsumi-san!? That lacking in form appearance! How crafty, what were you doing with everyone while I was asleep?”

“.....”

Hearing what Miku had said, everyone looked on at her silently. Indeed, Miku also noticed this sense of discomfort as she felt cold sweat hanging down her face while looking back at everyone in order.

“Er, um.....what happened, everyone? Somehow your faces look kind of scary.”

Miku scratched her face while creaking out those words. It seemed that she truly didn't remember anything. Looking at these circumstances, Natsumi let out a weary sigh as if completely exhausted.

“.....Miku, what kind of dream did you have.....were you eating at an all-you can eat hotel buffet?”

“Eh? A dream.....Ah, I remember now. It was a nice dream. A dream of sleeping together in the same room as Natsumi-san, Yoshino-san, Mukuro-san, and Tohka-san.....”

“Were you really dreaming!? Going back to that dream, why were you sleep-talking and move about like that!?”

In response to Miku’s answer, Natsumi raised a scream as if unable to bear it any longer.

Then——

“——What are you doing?”

As everyone was making a ruckus, rays of light from the outside corridor entered as someone’s shadow was casted onto the room.

“Mu?”

Looking there, they could see a girl standing near the entrance of the room. With hair reaching her shoulders and an expressionless face resembling a doll—it was Spirit who should have been sleeping in the adjacent room, Tobiichi Origami.

“Oh, Origami. Sorry, did we wake you up?”

After recognizing Origami’s appearance, Tohka slightly lowered her head. Origami has a high sensitivity to sound. If there was a loud commotion next door, it would have been difficult to not be woken up.

“.....”

However, Origami shook her head as if to refute Tohka’s suggestion. Feeling that something was off, Tohka slightly slanted her head.

“Mu.....what’s wrong?”

Faced with Tohka’s question, Origami replied back in a calm, but internally passionate tone.

“It’s good that everyone is up. —I have something important to say. Come.”

“.....?”

Sensing something unusual in Origami’s demeanor, Tohka made a small nod forward.



“.....So.”

After a long, long silence.

Kotori spewed out those brief words like dirty mud that had clogged her sunken heart.

It's been about 20 minutes since Shidou had successfully communicated with Maria. Following Maria's instructions, he had met up with Kotori in her office. There, he managed to shake off the heavy lead-like feeling as he explained the events of the future to Kotori.

And then—just that last word leaked out from Kotori's lips.

Very brief, but those two letters were more than enough to understand Kotori's heart.

In fact, she must have wanted to scream, to cry badly, to grab Shidou by the collar and yell at him for deceiving her.

However, Kotori didn't indiscriminately scatter any strong violent emotions—whether fortunate or unfortunate—Kotori had steeled herself. While shaking the black ribbons in her hair and the hem of her jacket on her shoulders, Kotori gently raised her sunken face.

“Thank you. Although it's probably painful, I'm glad you can tell me this.”

Kotori spoke in a gentle tone. However, contrary to that tone, the pain in her voice was unmistakably visible.

But that was to be expected. Kotori, who held the deepest trust in her own subordinates, had just discovered that Reine was the Spirit of Origin—and the perpetrator who turned Kotori into a Spirit five years ago.

Moreover, although it has not yet happened in this world, all of the Spirits including Kotori will be killed. Even for Kotori, it was impossible to withstand that fact.

“.....Sorry.”

“Why do you want to apologize? It's better to say that you're the one that shown quick wittedness at the eleventh hour. If it wasn't for Shidou, our fate would have already been decided. Really—thank you.”

While saying that, Kotori displayed a smile.

“Kotori—”

“—Well then, let's start strategizing.”

Looking at Kotori's overtly grief-like appearance, Shidou wanted to speak out. But at that moment, Maria's voice echoed from the speaker as if to interject between the two of them.

“.....”

Shidou held his breath slightly and, after a moment of hesitation, gently nodded.

“Ah.....that’s right.”

Then, he took out his smart phone from his pocket so that Kotori could also understand, entering a message saying “sorry and many thanks” to Maria. Then immediately on the screen, a reply saying “no need for thanks.....three supercomputers are more than enough” was displayed back.

It was obvious that Kotori was attempting to do the impossible. But even so, she was still trying to maintain the image of a strong commander. As such, Shidou couldn’t murmur about and waste her efforts.

Of course releasing one’s feelings out would feel healthier. There is a time where it is better to let out a cry more appropriate for a girl of her age.

But surely it was not now.

Because right now——nothing is over yet.

“.....”

After everything was over, he decided that he would hug Kotori with all of his strength and let her cry her heart out then. And so, with that in mind, Shidou continued talking.

“Anyway, I’ve succeeded on inviting Reine-san on a date. The problem is after this.”

“Yes, you have to think about the contents of the date to some extent before this morning. Of course, that is on the basis of securing the minimal amount of sleep.”

Kotori then continued while crossing her fingers together.

“At the same time, the preparations for DEM must also continue advancing. Even if the seal is successful for Reine——for Mio, but if we are destroyed by them afterwards, we’ll just be fisherman reeling in for the other party’s profit.”

“Haha.....for sure.”

Shidou forced a smile as he shrugged his shoulders.

Indeed, Shidou had just returned from a desperate end through the power of the Angel of time, <Zafkiel>.

He obtained the chance to redo a history that had already been decided.

But at the same time, what they accomplished in the future had also reverted back to nothing.

For Shidou and <Ratatoskr>, on February 20th, the all-out war against DEM—Deus Ex Machina Industries will commence.

At the end of the fierce battle, he had succeeded in defeating the enemy leader, Isaac Westcott—but there was no guarantee that this could work as well this time around.

After all, the abnormal situation of Westcott's appearance on the foreground was due to Mio appearing on the battlefield. If Shidou supposedly sealed Mio's reiryoku before the battle, then the enemy's offensive strategy will change dramatically. Although Mio remaining the top priority stayed unchanged, they were never an opponent where negligence should be afforded.

As Kotori shifted the conversation forward, she placed her hand against her chin and let out an "Hmm" sound.

"——The timing for sharing information to the rest of the crew is a bit troubling. Although it's not impossible to notify them for more assistance, there's also the possibility of it being noticed by Reine while she is still on the ship....."

"That's true, but I don't think it's necessary to worry too much. Reine has already moved to a private room, likely for until tomorrow morning in order to avoid getting assigned an emergency job."

"So that's the reason.....ah, is there a sudden job she needs to do early morning?"

"Since Reine is so talented, it's become a daily routine for crew members who have not finished their work to come crying to her. In that respect, we must be thankful that Nakatsugawa and Mikimoto have devoted their usual habits to the sidelines in favor of work. Really, it's hard to say what will come in handy."

"Hahaha....."

After hearing a frank evaluation that could either be praise or an insult, Shidou scratched his face at the ambiguity.

Well, while preparing for Mio's capture and countermeasures for DEM, it was imperative to increase the amount of companions who could grasp the situation without being noticed by Reine.But by no means did he ever think that Nakatsugawa's figurines and Mikimoto's private calls would have meaning here.

And then——with a thought entering his mind, Shidou raised the corners of his eyebrows.

Like the crew members, there were others that he wanted to tell about Reine.

Perhaps from the shift in his facial expression, Kotori likely had an idea of what he was thinking. Kotori let out a sigh as if in a difficult position.

"——Thinking about the Spirits?"

".....Well. Although it is something that cannot be avoided in being conveyed——but it still feels a little bit heavy."

Although their relationship is not as close as between Kotori and Reine, all of the Spirits have also been under Reine's care. Besides Shidou and Kotori, Reine is the person that they have been in contact with the most.

Having to tell them that such a dependable Onee-san had killed everyone, it still weighed heavily on Shidou's mind despite being unavoidable.

“Yes.....but they have to overcome that.”

“.....That's right.”

Shidou recalled back to the future world where Reine had revealed her true identity.

Even if they were confused, they had accepted the matter calmly. Of course, there may be reasons for why they couldn't panic amidst a fierce battle, but they were much stronger than he could imagine.

Indeed, <Ratatoskr> was an organization dedicated to protecting the Spirits, but it would still be an insult to disparage their mental strength and withhold information.

If it was them, they will certainly be able to overcome the truth. With such conviction in mind, Shidou once again nodded. Likewise, Kotori responded with the same gesture in kind.

“Having said that, aren't everyone asleep now? In fact, I would like to get everyone's opinions on a plan for the date, but we can't upset the status of the Spirits who are essential to the DEM plan——”

Just as Kotori was in the middle of speaking, Shidou's phone began to vibrate.

“Hmm.....?”

For a moment, he thought that it was Maria—but immediately that thought was refuted in his mind. Maria could directly speak through the terminal or send a text message to Shidou like she had just done before. There was no need to bother with a voice call.

While pondering this over, the name Tobiiichi Origami was displayed on the screen.

“Origami.....?”

Shidou shook his head as he pressed down on the reply button. Then, a quiet voice was heard.

“——I know about the story.”

“Eh.....?”

Those sudden words caused Shidou to yelp up in surprise. However, Origami didn't seem concerned about this as she continued on in a mild tone.

“We'll also help in the creation of a date plan. Please give permission to use the conference room.”

“W-wait a moment. How do you know about——”

“Can we bother you for a bit?”

As Shidou was left confused, Kotori reached up and snatched away the smart phone from Shidou's hands.

Then, she laid it down on the table and pressed on the speaker icon on the screen.

"Hello, Origami. Where are you now?"

"The second sleeping room."

Origami succinctly answered Kotori's question.

That wasn't all. Following Origami's reply, several voices also resounded from behind.

"—We're also here!"

"Haha, my curtain of darkness has begun to cradle!"

"Petition. Please allow Yuzuru and the others to also help."

"Wh—at—although it's become an unexpectedly hot blooded development, Nia-chan doesn't dislike these sorts of things."

Wait; while happy to hear the Spirit's voices, it seemed that everyone had already grasped Reine's true identity—or at the very least what was mentioned during Shidou and Kotori's conversation. Unable to grasp what had happened, Shidou raised his brow in confusion.

However, while looking at Shidou's face, Kotori seemed to notice something as she narrowed her eyes and opened her lips.

".....So? Where is it?"

"Second button."

As Origami answered back, Kotori turned to Shidou—gazing precisely at that button on the shirt Shidou was wearing.

"! Could it be that—"

Through that exchange, Shidou finally noticed.

Shidou turned his face downward and checked the button of the shirt he was wearing. There, he could see that the second button was indeed slightly different from the others.

Specifically, it was slightly heavier than the others and there was small hole on the back.

To say it bluntly—it looked like an eavesdropping device.

"Really.....to undertake that, Origami."

"I didn't expect information to be leaked through classical means. My hardships in elaborately camouflaging images and conversation logs inside the ship have all been for naught."

As Kotori gently swayed while exhaling, Maria let out a voice of disappointment from the speaker.

Then, while keeping up the pace, Origami continued to speak in an indifferent tone.

“A simple method works best at the very end. If Murasame-san had taken similar methods, it would already be game over. Please be careful.”

“No, it’s unlikely that Reine-san would install a wiretap function on a button!?”

“Preconceptions and beliefs are very dangerous. If you want to say that, then no one would have thought of her as the Spirit of Origin in the first place. You should always be prepared to think up the worst case scenario in advance.”

“Ku.....”

Hearing what Origami said, Shidou felt his throat get stuck.....that was certainly true.

However, Kotori shook her head as if to refute that.

“No, you mustn’t misunderstand Shidou. While preconceptions may be dangerous, the fact that Origami is trying to wiretap you is a completely different story, right?”

“This is a misunderstanding. I am doing this for the sake of caution for everyone.”

“...Well of course you haven’t set them up on any more clothes, right?”

“Not all.”

“This is not a set up place for traps!’

Kotori screamed that out as she slammed against the table.”

“Really.....”

Then, she turned her head while position herself back on her chair.

“.....So, do you all understand the circumstances?”

“Yup.”

“Yes.....!”

“Mun.”

A cry of affirmation was heard from the other side of the phone call.

Although her breathing was still ragged, Kotori let out a sigh of relief as she turned her attention to Shidou’s direction.

As Shidou gave a nod of consent, he then turned to face the audio speaker of the smart phone.

“I understand. Lend me your strength everyone. Let’s begin our——war (date).”

“——Ohh!”

The Spirits raised a collective cry. Shidou and Kotori looked at each other, not knowing who had a wry smile on their faces first.

“.....Well then, let’s begin moving right away. Let’s gather in the conference room. Although it’s unlikely to run into Reine while in the hallway due to work, please still have your excuses ready and head out one by one to avoid suspicion.”

“Understood. Then, see you later.”

After giving a brief reply to Kotori’s instructions, Origami ended the call. After confirming this, Shidou placed the phone back in his pocket.

“.....Well, let’s go over there in order as well. It’s unnatural for Shidou to be at my office when I’m not present. Can you head out first?”

“Ah. Okay. But——”

Kotori casted a curious look as Shidou suddenly stopped speaking as he was getting up from the chair.

“What’s wrong?”

“——Before meeting with everyone, there’s still some time left. I have something that I want to finish first...can I?”

Shidou spoke while having a tight expression on his face. Feeling this, Kotori slightly raised her brow.

“What do you want to do first.....?”

“Well.....I don’t know if I can succeed. And I don’t know if this is truly correct or not. But——only this matter, I know I have to do first.”

Faced with Kotori’s question, Shidou tightly clenched his fist.



The expression of inhaling in the starry sky—— this impression is used to show adoration for a magnificent beauty, but there was also a slight degree of terror from this origin.

While looking up at the sky from the high ground of a park in the outskirts of Tenguu City, Shidou couldn’t help but subconsciously think of such thoughts.

Despite seeing this obviously every night, there was something completely unclear right in front of him. Such an unknown existence was close by. Like the belly of a huge monster. If he took one more step forward, he would never be able to return—a vague fear. Well, it is perhaps because of this fear that some people would find it beautiful.

A winter sky without any clouds, several flickering stars formed the backdrop to the phantasmal scenery. Perhaps it was because everything surrounding him being covered by darkness, but he couldn't judge the sense of distance very well. Merely, just looking at this made him feel as if he was falling into a void.

“_____”

—Although he did not plan or cater to this, it was a time and place consistent of her. Shidou shrugged his shoulders at the self-propelled feeling.

That's right. This was the reason why Shidou choose to use some of his valuable time to be dropped to the ground from <Fraxinus>.

In addition to the crew members and Spirits who were on the ship, there was one more person that Shidou had to tell the truth.

Shidou looked down from the sky, taking the chance for a sweeping look at the park's premises.

There was no one here. It was already a bit later than midnight. Even if someone was at the station, there should be no one at a park in the suburbs at this time. —For this reason, Shidou had chosen this place to be transferred from <Fraxinus>.

In fact, there was no personal attachment to this place. Anywhere on the ground where there were no people and a shadow could be formed was sufficient enough.

—Since she was always thoroughly observing Shidou.

“I want to talk. —You should be here, Kurumi.”

Shidou spoke out to the empty night. Although he didn't intend to yell, the lack of noise in the park to drown out his voice caused it to slowly spread over time, echoing throughout the park.

Then, a few seconds later, Shidou's eyes caught wind of something bizarre.

At one of the street lamps at the outer edge of the park, a small central black spot appeared at the base of lamp post's dim light.

As that area gradually expanded, it grew into a murky shadow-like puddle—after a while, a single girl emerged from there.

With dark, black glossy hair and contrasting white face, the dress covering her body was also comprised of the same two colors. A rose design decorated both her hair and chest. A mysterious smiled was shaped as her right eye was glimmering red from the light of the street lamp.

“—Ara, ara.”

This girl—Kurumi, just like a young lady from a noble lineage, or possibly a fool playing a jestful performance, gave a respectful curtsy.

That's right. It was the Worst Spirit—Tokisaki Kurumi.

The Spirit with the Angel of time, <Zafkiel>, and Shidou's greatest benefactor when recalling back to that moment. Meeting with this girl here was Shidou's goal.

“How rare for Shidou-san to call out for me—well, have you finally become interested in giving me your reiryoku?”

As Kurumi spoke in a joking manner, Shidou returned back with a small shrug.

“Unfortunately, we made a promise you would have to make me fall in love first.”

“Ufufu, that's true.”

From the very beginning, it was unlikely that Kurumi thought that Shidou had called her here for such a case. She let out a small frivolous laugh.

Shidou once again turned to look at her. Her long hair was not bundled and her characteristic left eye was covered by a medical eyepatch.

—No doubt about it. She was both Kurumi and not Kurumi.

Through Kurumi's Angel <Zafkiel>, a past mind can be given a corporal body by using the Eight Bullet <Het>.

Moreover, this Kurumi had the same distinctive dress as the one he saw five years ago in the past.

Although it was expected that the main body wouldn't be the one monitoring Shidou, he didn't expect her to be the one to come out. Shidou remembered a strange feeling as he continued to speak.

“.....Just in case, let me ask. Are you the only one here?”

“Ufufu, what are you talking about?”

When questioned by Shidou, Kurumi responded by shifting the topic. Well, from her standpoint, it wasn't as if she was going to reveal her thoughts to Shidou.

“Please. Tell me. —Is the real Kurumi listening to this conversation? If not, do you know if the real Kurumi can talk now?”

“.....You sure are asking a strange question, Shidou-san?”

Whether from Shidou's strange inquiry or the incomprehensible atmosphere perceived, Kurumi slightly narrowed her eyes.

Then, after watching Shidou's eyes for a while, she let out a small sigh as if having lost her footing.

“—The authentic “me” is not here right now. And if I was to communicate with the authentic “me”, I can share it verbally or directly convey the information from my brain—though since it costs time to use the Tenth Bullet <Yud>, the latter isn't the first choice.”

“Hmm.....if you can do something as useful as sharing it directly from your mind, is there any need to explain it verbally?”

When questioned, Kurumi responded back with a grandiose shrug.

“Of course. Even for a clone, we have our own privacy. No matter what our future is, no one wants to be completely exposed.”

“T-that sort of.....”

However, Kurumi continued on.

“By communicating verbally, information can also be discarded. Our number is enormous. Even for the real “me”, the mind won't be able to sustain that much.”

“So that's the reason.....”

It made sense while listening to her. Or rather, despite Kurumi's jest, privacy did seem to be the original reason.

“Sharing information directly into the mind.....? If that's the case...no, if that's possible—”

While Shidou placed his hand against his chin pondering this over, Kurumi pouted her lips in dissatisfaction.

“What are you mumbling about all alone? Is that all you wanted to say?”

“Ah no, sorry.”

After Shidou bowed his head in apology, he stared directly into Kurumi's eyes as he continued to speak.

“The next thing I'm going to say, I don't not whether or not to tell the real Kurumi. So—please listen and judge for me.”

“That's certainly putting on airs. Well, what do you need to say?”

Kurumi raised her arms and furrowed her brow as if urging him to speak. Shidou then took in a long sigh to adjust his breathing before beginning to explain.

“On February 20th.....the original Kurumi—will die.”

“.....Ara, ara.”

Hearing what Shidou had said, Kurumi stood dumbfounded for a second before quickly distorting her facial expression after grasping the meaning behind those words.

“You speak, as if you’ve already seen it happen?”

“.....Ah, you’re right.”

“The Twelfth Bullet <Yud Bet>no, the Sixth Bullet <Vav>? But how was “me” exactly defeated? Even if it was Ellen Matters, “me” shouldn’t have been that easy to be taken down.”

Kurumi asked while touching one of her fingers.

With a slight degree of nervous tension, Shidou spoke out that name.

“.....Takamiya, Mio.”

“_____”

Kurumi’s relaxed expression fell into chaos—but that was soon replaced by a look of disgust and trepidation.

“Shidou-san, what did you just say now?”

“Yes—Mio. The Spirit of Origin will kill Kurumi. No.....to be precise, Mio must already be in within the original Kurumi. On the battlefield, Mio suddenly appeared coming out from the original Kurumi.”

“.....”

From what Shidou had said, Kurumi must have thought back to something. Perspiration hanged down her face as her expression grew steeper from the danger.

“...So it turns out to be caused from that time. —Although I thought it was a bit too simple, to come out during then.”

After a moment of quiet consideration, Kurumi took in a long sigh.

“.....I appreciate this information. Certainly, if Mio-san is alive inside “me”, than it’s possible for her to obtain outside information through the sensory organs of “me”. Shidou-san’s judgement is correct.”

“How.....? Is it possible to communicate this information to Kurumi without letting Mio know?”

“Perhaps not. —Even if knowing this, it requires being capable of surviving a state while the enemy is hiding within one’s own body.”

As Kurumi spoke with a bittersweet smile, Shidou held his breath as he tightly gripped his fist.

“That’s.....true.”

“Ufufu, please don’t show such a gloomy expression. While this is indeed a hopeless situation—but thanks to Shidou-san’s benevolence, “me” will get to make a choice.”

As Kurumi finished speaking, her skirt twirled around as she turned her body.

“—Well then, as for this advice from the future, I will definitely convey it to “me”.”

“Ah. Thank you. Kurumi. —Really.”

As Shidou lowered his head in gratitude, Kurumi gently smiled after shooting a quick glance at the comical scene.

“Ufufu, you can sure exaggerate anything. That kind of——”

Then, perhaps having guessed the meaning behind Shidou’s words, Kurumi slightly shook her eyebrows as she turned her face.

“——Shidou-san, was I able to fulfill my duties in the future?”

“.....Ah, the best work possible.”

“Is that so?”

As Shidou finished speaking, Kurumi let out a faint smile before disappearing back into the shadow.



“.....”

Inside a private room within <Fraxinus>, the backrest of the chair let out a squeaky sound as Reine finished her work on the terminal console.

She glanced at the time indicated on the corner of the display——1:30 a.m. Well, it’s would have been a relatively early end.

Reine turned the monitor to sleep mode and got up from the chair to gently stretch.

“.....A date.....”

Then, those ruminating words leaked out of her like falling droplets.

No doubt, at that timing, she would never expect Shidou to invite her on a date.

It was hard to believe that Reine’s identity as a Spirit had been revealed. If so——

“.....”

Reine shook her head as if to dissuade herself from these thoughts.

Regardless of Shidou's intention, it didn't matter.

——For Reine, to refuse the invitation was impossible.

“.....Now.”

After letting out a brief sigh, Reine left the room with a bag containing underwear, casual clothes, and a cosmetic pouch holding milky lotion. The aim was to use the new large bath created during <Fraxinus>'s renovation.

Today was already very late. But since there was still something to do tomorrow, it wasn't good to go to bed so sweaty.

As a matter of course if strictly speaking, as a Spirit, Reine did not require such work. Even if she didn't clean the dirt on her body or apply lotion after a shower, the condition of her body would still remain impeccable. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that this was a waste of time and money for Reine.

However, the reason for doing such a thing was simple. It was nothing more than the standard action of someone who was exhausted in her 20s.

In order to not be ousted as a Spirit, Reine lived her life with the utmost care. Of course, there was no problem when you're alone, but this habit would be revealed if one is too lax. Thinking in that unlikely event, Reine placed “human behavior” in her mind for as much as possible. ——Well, since too much excessive thoroughness would appear not human as well, so Reine had to intentionally regulate these habits in respects to the perceived degree of fatigue on her body.

In a sense, sleeping was also one of these things. Although Reine had not slept once in the last thirty years, she would always try to lie down at night and close her eyes until morning.

No——saying that for each time would be faulty wording. Correctly speaking, she had tried to go to sleep numerous times. Although Reine could still act without sleep, she understood that a person who slept would wake up with more efficient energy the next morning. So while laying down with her consciousness still up, she would fight off the boredom for a few hours.

However, every time she would fall asleep——Reine would always have the same dream.

She still couldn't forget that scene from thirty years ago.

Shin——Takamiya Shinji, the despair of his death replaying before her very eyes.

In each time, Reine would wake up with grueling screams and tears in her eyes that were accompanied by intense physical and mental exhaustion.

For Reine, night was not a time for sleep, sleep was not restful.

At that moment——

“Mu.....!”

“.....Hmm?”

Thinking of this while leading to the large bath, Reine gently ran into someone at the corner of the hallway.

At a first glance, it was the Spirit ▪ Tohka, who should have been asleep in the lounge room along with the others. She was wearing cardigan pajamas and a pair of sandals covering her feet.

“R-reine.....?”

“.....Ah, Tohka. Why are you up at such a time?”

When asked by Reine, Tohka turned her eyes over in a flustered state.

“N-no, that’s.....”

“.....? Ah.....”

Seeing her restless appearance, Reine raised her brow.

“.....If you want a mid-night snack, head to the cafeteria or the restroom. There should still be enough time, but don’t forget to brush your teeth before going to bed.”

“.....! U-umu.....I’ll be careful.”

Hearing what Reine had said, Tohka nodded with trembling shoulders. Even though she was discovered this late at night, she shouldn’t be this nervous.Ah, but then again, it could be one of the social manners she acquired to feel shame at such instances. Having settled on that, Reine resumed walking.

“.....Reine!”

Just a few steps away; she was stopped by Tohka from behind.

“.....Hmm? What is it Tohka?”

Turning around at the spot and asking for Reine, Tohka stared at her silently before moving her lips.

“.....”

“Reine.....do you like Shidou?”

“.....?”

Being suddenly asked such a thing, Reine slanted her head a little.

“.....That, what——”

“Don’t say that!.....Answer me. Please.”

“.....”

Reine grew silent for a while. Tohka’s unusual question.Was it something instilled to her by Miku or Nia?

Although she didn’t understand why, the look in her eyes was serious.

If that’s the case—the question should already be decided. Reine quietly moved her lips.

“.....Ah, I like him.”

“——I see. Umu.”

As Reine answered back, Tohka nodded while maintaining her sincere expression.

“.....Me too!”

Then, after energetically saying that, she continued walking towards the corridor.

“.....”

But before she could have added that of course she liked everyone, Tohka had already left. ...Well, it seemed that she had reached a level of closure, so Reine viewed it as being finished successfully for now.

After deciding upon that, Reine choose to continue moving forward.

But at that moment, a certain possibility passed through her mind. Could it be that Tohka was aware that Shidou had invited her on a date?

—If so, wasn’t that previous encounter akin to a declaration of war?

“.....No, I’m overthinking it too much.”

As Reine turned to look at Tohka’s back, she decided to continue on walking towards her own destination.

Chapter 2: The Second Date

February 19th, the forecast called for clear morning skies.

Naturally, for Shidou who had already experience this day before, he wasn't worried about the weather. Even if there was the possibility that history would now change because of the behavior of people, it was unlikely that the weather would also change.

There were a sporadic amount of pedestrians near Tenguu Station this morning. Perhaps, due to being a day of rest, the number of people heading to the train station to play was much more than the usual amount of students departing for school.

The time was 9:50 a.m. There was still ten minutes before the promised meeting time. Shidou nervously gulped as he glanced at the clock in the center of the station to reconfirm the time.

“.....No, no.”

Noticing this anxious feeling within himself, Shidou pressed his hand against his chest to adjust his breathing. Even through his shirt, sweater, and thick coat, the violent rhythm from his heart pulsating was felt at his fingertips.

There was no use being nervous. But this tension was not from fear, but rather from the feelings of uneasiness in the expectations for this date with Reine.

Indeed, Reine—Mio had killed all of the Spirits in the future world. Rewriting the future from that despair was Shidou's goal.

However, he had to avoid the date with Reine becoming solely focused as a means to an end.

Today, Shidou was looking forward to the date from the bottom of his heart and must allow Reine to also enjoy it as well. To go even farther, in order to get Reine to fall in love with Shidou—even if that was impossible—he must get her to open her heart to him.

For this reason, he had to abolish all doubts and fears of her.

“—It's about time. Reine also just left <Fraxinus> a while ago. She should be there soon.
—Are you ready?”

As if having read through Shidou's heart, Kotori's voice echoed from somewhere far off.

Nevertheless, Shidou was not wearing his usual headset for capturing Spirits on his right ear.

The type used for Spirits would have been noticed by Reine, who had been participating in all of the captures up until now. As a result, the latest bone conduction type communication machine was attached to his neck.

Although Shidou thought that if there was a more convenient style, it would have been better to use it earlier.....but the feeling of usage was certainly different. Still, there was no issue for complaints since thanks to this; conversations could now be overheard under Reine's notice.

“.....Ah.”

Shidou gently exhaled as he let out a voice below a whisper.

Honestly, saying that he had no fears would be a lie.

However——it wasn't difficult to think that Shidou would sincerely enjoy this date.

Right now within Shidou, the memories of Takamiya Shinji have been stirred awake by Mio.

Moreover, Shinji loved Mio, liking her so much to the point it couldn't be helped.

It was yearning so strong that it felt like it would scorch. An intense affection, a wave of rampant emotions that Shidou feared would overwhelm himself.

That wasn't right——speaking more accurately, it wasn't only that. Shidou suddenly closed his eyes and recalled his first meeting with Murasame Reine.

It was about ten months ago from now. After the first time Shidou encountered a Spirit, he had woken up in the infirmary on <Fraxinus> with Reine right beside him. Looking back now, the voice he had heard in his dreams must have been her voice.

His first impression of her was that of a——“strange person”. Having said that, she had never slept in 30 years, the thick dark rings around her eyes, and the peculiar stuffed bear in her pocket. Also, there was her somewhat dimly speech pattern, drowsiness, and occasional collapsing onto the ground without warning.

But despite all of that——Shidou thought that she was beautiful.

Not only in appearance and posture, but she had an atmosphere full of elegance that wasn't weakened in the slightest by those aforementioned features. There were her intellectual conduct and movements, and even the melancholic expression shown on her face from time to time.

Even though it was nothing compared to what Shinji felt for Mio, it was also possible to call this emotion love. There may be a slight deviation in feeling; but——Shidou certainly felt a yearning of wanting to be embraced by Reine.

So——while it may seem imprudent to shed out his feelings like this——but somewhere in his heart, Shidou was genuinely looking forward to today's date.

After realizing this, his heartbeat began to gradually calm down. Shidou took a small breath in and opened his closed eyes.

At that moment.

“.....Ya, I've kept you waiting.”

“Uhya!?”

At the next instance, Reine's face appeared in front of his eyes. Shidou trembled while raising a hysteric voice.

“R-reine-san.....!? How long have you been here!?”

“.....Un. I've just arrived. You seemed to have been thinking about something so I didn't want disturb you.”

“I-is that so.....”

As Shidou struggled to reply back, he cleared out his throat to regain his composure.

Thereupon again, Reine's dress was reflected to his eyes.

She had on her neither her military uniform worn on the ship nor the lab coat for school hours. But rather, she was wearing a thick overcoat overlaying on a white dress.

Her hair that was scattered casually on a daily basis was beautifully combed and her lips were coated with a lipstick faintly different than usual.

It was a different dress from a hidden collaborator from <Ratatoskr>, or an outfit a student would see a teacher in. Today—it was clothing a woman would show to a man.

With a posture that looked difficult to associate with the usual Reine, Shidou felt himself awestruck for a brief period.

No—that surely wasn't the only reason Shidou was so captivated.

The white dress she wore underneath that coat.

Due to differing seasons, the fabric was thicker and sleeves were now attached. The hem of the skirt was long enough to hide her knees. At her feet, she was not wearing women's slippers, but rather a combination of black tights and boots.

There was no denying the difference. But it was clear that the clothes she had consciously chosen now were done in reference to the clothes Mio wore on her date with Shinji.

“.....”

A deep feeling filled between his lungs. The memories of Shinji that survived in Shidou's heart couldn't help but want to speak up.

It was pleasant for him that she still remembered that date.

The clothes she had picked out for today were near identical to the ones chosen before.

At that moment—

“—Dou.....,Shidou! Hey, are you listening!?”

“.....!”

As Shidou held back the tears in the corners of his eyes, Kotori's voice was transmitted to the nape of his neck.

"Really.....to be in such a daze from just the first contact."

"....."

Shidou apologized as he touched the communicator. Then, Kotori let out a helpless sigh.

"Well, forget it. The choices have just come out. —Everyone, are you ready?"

Then, as if to respond to that—

"—Ohh!"

A voice from the non <Fraxinus> crew members echoed from the communication device.

The <Ratatoskr> airborne ship, <Fraxinus Ex-celsior>

There were several more figures on the bridge than usual.

While the bridge was divided into two tiers, the familiar <Fraxinus> crew was on the lower floor. Of course, everyone had already heard the explanation about Reine. Although surprised by the true identity of their colleague, it wouldn't change their methods since the other party was a Spirit, as they all enthusiastically participated in the strategy.

At the same time, on the upper level of the bridge, there were several reserved seats made available—where a number of Spirits stood.

Tohka, Origami, Yoshino, Kaguya, Yuzuru, Miku, and Mukuro all surrounded Kotori's captain seat. One step below everyone else, Nia was sitting at the seat for the Analytic Officer. Everyone looked on at their personal monitors with a serious look as Shidou and Reine's figures were on display through the main monitor.

This was a scene unlikely to happen in normal circumstances. Choosing the options on the bridge to support Shidou's date was the role of the crew. For the Spirits themselves to be involved, so far there was no precedent for this. Let alone allowing the Spirits to see Shidou capturing another Spirit, it was difficult to imagine that this would have a positive impact for them.

But—now. Due to a strong demand from the Spirits, this support system has been implemented.

It was unbearable for everyone.

Leaving it only to Shidou, a date that held everyone's fate.

Being forced to be left unaware of the difficult struggle Shidou was fighting for their sakes.

“.....”

Sitting on top of the captain seat, Kotori glanced to look at the Spirits. For a moment, the corners of her mouth relaxed—but immediately afterwards, she returned back to her serious commander expression as she gazed back at the options displayed on her screen.

① Sorry, I was just charmed by Reine-san just now.

② Your hairstyle looks different from usual, it looks beautiful.

③ How can I get those clothes off you?

“All members—select your choice!”

“Yes!”

“Ohh!”

Both the crew members and the Spirits responded to Kotori’s command.

Incidentally, Origami and Natsumi’s consoles were virtually identical to the rest of the crew members. But for Tohka and Mukuro, it may have been a little bit too difficult to operate, so it was remodeled as a simple control panel with three buttons attached.

After a few seconds, the total statistics were displayed on the main monitor. The most popular choice was—①.

“①?It’s a normal choice.”

As Kotori said that, the Spirits who had chosen ① came to an agreement.

“Yes, saying nothing would be uneasy. But, I think that answer would make someone else happy.....”

“.....What’s up with that consideration? Goddess? A Goddess? First of all, you have to observe the situation; I choose ① for that reason.....”

“Umu, this ought to be acceptable for Reine.”

Kotori lightly nodded in agreement to Yoshino’s opinion. Indeed, it certainly was impeccable for an excuse of being caught in a momentary daze.”

“Mun.....Muku thinks that ② isn’t bad, but it can’t be helped anyway now.”

“Naturally, God dwells in the nuances. It’s important to notice the small changes from the other party, but——”

“Supplementary. Depending on the person, it may be regarded as the usual hairstyle being unsatisfactory. Firstly, we should gauge the situation with a safe choice.”

Mukuro and the Yamai sisters also gave a look of consent.

After listening to those opinions, Kotori glance slightly to the left side.

“.....And what do you three think?”

Kotori narrowed her eyes while look on towards Nia, Miku, and Origami.

“No, it should obviously be ③! No one would expect such a surprise attack from simple-minded boy! From now until the affairs of the nighttime, Onee-san here is trembling in excitement just thinking about it!”

“That’s right. Reine-san is a mature woman! She’ll definitely accept this kind of wit!”

“Is the video here recorded? Please send me a copy later.”

“At least give an explanation Origami!?”

Hearing the replies from those three, Kotori let out a helpless sigh at their (especially Origami’s) response.

“Hey.....since our future is depending on this, can you take this more seriously?”

“I understand. That’s why I told you the most pleasing option for myself that I heard.”

“.....”

A speechless answer. Sweat hanged down from Kotori’s face.

Nonetheless, not everyone would respond well to this sudden development. Kotori made up her mind as picked up the microphone.

“—Shidou, choose ①. Let’s start here with a straightforward reply.”

Hearing the Kotori’s instructions from the communicator, Shidou gave a slight nod before beginning to speak to Reine.

“Yeah.....sorry. I’ve never seen you look like this before, so how should I say this.....I was enchanted looking at Reine-san.”

“.....Hmm?”

Listening to what Shidou had said, Reine seemed to have.....faintly twitched her sleepy eyes open.

“.....Really. Hmm. Is that so?”

For some reason, she placed her hand against her chin as she whispered something vague. Although there was no change in expression, Shidou couldn't help but think that it made her happy.

“.....Then it can't be helped. Your clothes are also very handsome.”

“Ah.....thank you for the compliment.”

Receiving an unexpected counterattack, Shidou instinctively felt his cheeks redden.

Actually, Shidou's outfit today was chosen through the advice brought together by the Spirits. Although he was embarrassed at being praised, more than anything else, there was joy at everyone's efforts bearing fruit.

“.....Well then, Shin. Where are you going today? I see that you've brought a lot of luggage.”

Reine asked while looking at the trolley suitcase being pulled by Shidou.

Reine's question was not unreasonable. Shidou's luggage was large enough that it seemed like someone preparing for a short-term trip. At the very least, it didn't seem like the preparation for a person about to fight in an all-out war tomorrow.

“Ah, please rest assured. I'm not afraid of fighting and intending to live in seclusion.”

As Shidou jokingly replied, Reine let out a small “.....eh?” sound while slightly squinting her eyes.

“.....Is that so? That's really regrettable.”

“Huh?”

Having heard an unexpected response from Reine, Shidou rounded his eyes in surprise.

“.....I would be honored if you choose me as your elopement partner. If you want to escape, I'll follow you to the ends of the earth.”

“E-eh.....Reine-san?”

As Shidou was struggling to speak in his confusion, Reine blinked a few times before abruptly closing her eyes.



“Eh? Ah—like that!?”

Listen to that, Shidou let out an uncharacteristically high pitched voice.No, if this was calmly considered, then it was clearly meant to be a joke. However, under these circumstances, it was much easier for one to become flustered.

Shidou regrouped his composure by clearing his throat with a forced cough before continuing on.

“The place to go today is.....still a secret. I want to surprise Reine-san. —Are you willing to trust and follow me?”

“.....Oh, sure. Let’s go.”

After hearing Shidou’s words, Reine made a slight nod of consent with a faint hint of indecision—then her eyebrows twitched as if noticing something.

“Reine-san? What’s the matter?”

“.....This is a date, isn’t it?”

“Yes—but I don’t think it’s that yet for the time being.”

“.....Hmm. Then—”

Looking towards Shidou’s direction, Reine reached out in a natural movement.

“.....Holding hands. Can we?”

“—!”

Listening to Reine’s sudden proposal, even Shidou’s innermost thoughts were left momentarily stunned. Her soft white fingers turned towards his stomach, ushering in an invitation to Shidou,

However, Shidou managed to smile back after pretending to calm down.

“Yes. After all, this is a date—but I failed.”

“.....Failed?”

“Yes, originally I wanted to ask for that.”

Hearing Shidou’s words caused Reine to widen her eyes, and then she gently smiled at him.

“.....That’s right. Then I’ve done something bad.”

“No, it’s fine since I got to see a rare expression from Reine-san.”

Shidou spoke with a smile as he reached out to grab the hand that Reine had extended out.

Her hand was smaller than expected, so delicate that it seemed it would break if he exerted more strength on his grip. Was this feeling because of the cold February air, her natural low body temperature—or was it from the excitement and tension heating up his hand? Right now, Shidou couldn't distinguish the reason.

However, he tried not to let this feeling show on his face as he continued to take Reine's hand while walking down the street.

—It was now the beginning of the war (date) where the future of the Spirits and Shidou were wagered on the line.

“.....”

Looking at the main monitor on the bridge, Kotori twirled the Chupa Chups stick in her mouth up and down.

The center of the screen reflected Shidou and Reine's figures. They had taken a taxi nearby the station and were now on their way to the destination.

Of course, this was also a planned move. The taxi had accidentally stopped to keep up the façade. The driver was also a member of <Ratatoskr>, although it took a little effort to find a member that Reine had not yet met. In any case, there were no problems with Shidou's progression as of now, but—

“.....Hmm. What's wrong, Kotori?”

Surprised by Kotori's attitude, from the right hand side, Mukuro slightly tilted her head in confusion. Kotori stopped shaking the Chupa Chups stick in her mouth as she turned to glance at her.

“Nothing, it's just Reine's relationship values.....”

While saying that, she turned once again towards the monitor.

On both sides of the screen where Shidou and Reine were being recorded, there was data analyzed by the various observation instruments, but—in one of the figures that denoted Reine's relationship values to Shidou, there was previously unseen curve on display.

“What is this mysterious waveform? It's clear that the positive emotions for Shidou are close to the extent of being sealable soon, but there isn't any sealable response. Although the emotional values are also extremely stable.....but on the other hand it doesn't show any protruding response of increasing as well. —It's frustrating like the feeling of a throat being tickled. It's like there nothing to begin to work with.”

Naturally, this was the first time analyzing Reine, but they didn't expect such a wavelength response. In the end, it was impossible to have any idea where to attack first from this.

Whether watching things from a bird's eye perspective or keeping distance from a dearly beloved, the relationship values from Reine resembled someone looking at everyone else on the stage from the sidelines.

How to describe this, it was—

“—A mother-like, feeling?”

“.....!”

Hearing what Nia had just said, Kotori twitched her brow upward.

“.....I see, that may also explain it.”

While saying that, Kotori made a sullen face. Indeed, the wavelength caused her to reminisce of the love a mother would have for a child.

Kotori remembered what Shidou had told her last night. —Mio, the creator of all other Spirits, and also the Spirit who absorbed the deceased Takamiya Shinji to give birth to Shidou. Perhaps, she was a suitable existence to be called a mother.

However—rather than an affectionate mother who embraces and accepts all, she was a huge mother who would swallow her children and destroy them.

“.....But that being said.”

Kotori thought about it once again while stroking her chin.

It's true that the relationship between Reine and Shidou, as well as the Spirits, was similar to a mother-child relationship.

Moreover, since Mio and Shinji were lovers. Usually, if leaving the two on their own devices, a response should appear. However—

“In order to fulfill that goal, it is necessary to strengthen the concept that Shinji and Shidou are the same person.....or let her realize that Shinji and Shidou are different people—no matter what, neither method looks particularly easy.”

While watching the taxi pass through the general road and enter the expressway, Kotori licked her lips.



Despite not knowing how long since departing from Tenguu station, the taxi carrying Shidou crossed the freeway and the mountain pass before finally reaching their destination.

“Is here ok?”

The driver glanced at the rearview mirror as he asked for a confirmation from them. Shidou gently nodded to confirm this as he took out his wallet from his pocket.

“Yes, thank you very much.”

While double checking the toll meter for the distance traveled, Shidou pulled out the corresponding bank notes from his wallet. Then, Reine raised her voice below a whisper.

“.....Are you paying? It’s quite a good amount of money.”

“No need to trouble yourself, I will pay it.”

“.....But.”

“Don’t worry about it. —Please let me look a little bit better.”

“.....Well then, I’ll leave it to you.”

As Shidou smiled while speaking, Reine withdrew obediently. Perhaps she thought that being too persistent would be cause Shidou to lose face in this situation.

After making quick work finishing the payment, Shidou got out of the car first and extended out his hand to escorts Reine.

“Please watch your step.”

“.....Ah, thank you.”

As Reine step out the car while taking Shidou’s guiding hand, she momentarily narrowed her sight after blinded by the sunlight beaming through the trees—before long, she opened her eyes to see towering building soaring over the ground.

“.....This is.”

A huge building was standing there. The entrance was a magnificent gate with a historical feel. Peeking at the roof tiles, one was able to catch a glimpse of the superior craftsmanship. At the spacious entrance, women wearing traditional Japanese clothes and men wearing hantens lined up to greet Shidou and Reine.

“.....This is a ryokan?”

“Yes.”

Faced with Reine’s question, Shidou reassuringly replied back

That’s right. This was the location for the date that everyone had brainstormed for last night.

—From everyone’s consensus, the conclusion drawn was that what Reine needed most was “healing”.

She was perhaps the most hard working member onboard <Fraxinus>, doubling also with a teaching job at Raizen High School. Even when ignoring that, she had been struggling with a single goal for over 30 years. Regardless of being a Spirit, it's no wonder that she has been so physically and mentally exhausted. In fact, everyone thought that the exaggerated dark rings under Reine's eyes and her inexplicable sleepy atmosphere were proof of that.

Far from the hustle and bustle of the city, with the aid of the various relaxing facilities such as hot springs, it would eliminate the long-standing drowsiness and fatigue that Reine had been accumulating.

If her fatigue can be resolved, then her obstinate heart ought to become more serene as well—this was Shidou's chief aim.

“.....”

Needless to say, Shidou didn't think that this was enough to thaw her firm resolve.

In the end, this was just a stage device.

What mattered was—the actions that Shidou would take here.

As Shidou was thinking this over, Reine gazed at the exterior of the ryokan before suddenly speaking.

“.....That reminds me, did you tell the Spirits about today?”

“No, it's a secret between us.”

Shidou immediately replied back. Well, in fact rather than just knowing, everyone was watching the date from the main monitor on the bridge.

Then, he heard Reine mutter a “...hmm” sound to herself before she spoke.

“.....Yes, it really feels like an adulterous trip.”

“Ugh.....!?”

Hearing something that exceeded his expectations, Shidou reflexively had a coughing fit in response to Reine's words.

“...No, sorry. That came out carelessly.”

“N-no.....”

Shidou felt his face cramp up from the forced smile on his face.Although the purpose of the trip was certainly for relaxation, he could understand how this location left that impression on Reine.

.....Reine and an adulterous trip. This inexplicable temptation caused cause Shidou's heart to inconceivably undulate.

However, he couldn't let himself be stuck here forever. Shidou coughed twice to clear his mind before continuing on.

“Well, anyway, I have it scheduled so that we can return back for tomorrow's battle.”

While speaking, Shidou tightened his grip on Reine's hand.

“So for now—let's stretch our wings to our heart's content.”

“.....”

Reine returned back Shidou's gaze.

“.....Well then, this is a chance for me to presume upon your benevolence.”

Reine also applied more force in gripping Shidou's hand,

“—!”

Although her grip was not as strong as Shidou's, her firm grip still conveyed a feeling of deep trust and affection.

Whether this feeling was Shidou's own for Reine or Shinji's feelings for Mio wasn't clear. Still, Shidou remembered yearning a desire to reflexively embrace her.

Despite having said that, it was impossible to do such a thing here. While suppressing that impulse, Shidou guide Reine's hand into the ryokan.

“Welcome.”

The staff of the ryokan including the proprietress bowed as they respectfully greeted them. Shidou finished the procedure at the front desk before being guided into a room by hostess.

“The large public bath is on the first floor. Please refer to this guide for instructions on the other facilities. I hope you enjoy your stay here.”

The hostess bowed again before leaving the room. After watching her leave, Shidou carefully looked around the room.

It was a traditional Japanese-style room at around 20 tatami mats. A firmly made chair and cushions were at the center of the room, decorated with a flower vase that was basking in the indirect lighting from the paper oil lanterns.

A paper sliding door marked off the interior of the room, the wide corridor—the so-called mysterious space of any ryokan—extending out from that place and lead to a small personal open-air bath dedicated for this suite.

It would be considered too luxurious for a high school student to be given such a suite. Looking at the room for the first time, Shidou couldn't help but let out his voice.

“.....Un, it's a nice room.”

“Haha.....yes.”

As Shidou replied back with a smile, he picked up the inn’s instructional pamphlet that introduced the various facilities.

A large bathhouse, bedrock bathes, beauty treatments, messages.....just from a rough glance he could see there was a variety of options in this hotel.

Which one to try first—while thinking of something along those lines, Shidou suddenly heard Kotori’s voice from the communication machine.

“—Shidou, the options are coming.”

Three options were once again displayed on the main monitor onboard Fraxinus, which was currently floating directly above the ryokan where Shidou was currently residing.

- ① Enjoy the open space of the huge public baths.
- ② Spend a relaxing time in the private outdoor bath.
- ③ Refresh your body with a massage.

“All members——select the option!”

As the crew members on the lower part of the bridge heard Kotori’s commands, they began to operate on the consoles at once.

Even the Spirits on the upper half of the bridge, who were momentarily puzzled by the choices given, soon made up her minds on the selection of the choice.

The choice chosen by everyone was——②

“Hmm.....② huh.”

Kotori spoke while lifting the Chupa Chups stick upward. The Spirits then made a collective nod of consent.

“.....Umu. Shidou and Reine bathing together.....that, although it may feel uncomfortable, I would be happiest with this option chosen.”

“Yes.....I think it would better if the two of them talked together alone.”

As Tohka and Yoshino spoke with a complicated facial expression, Origami remained emotionless despite her hand slightly trembling.

“There is no one to hinder when they are alone in a small bath. It is an ideal condition. It doesn’t matter. I am calm. I am calm. I am calm.”

“Hey, why did you say that three times.....?”

As Natsumi spoke while shivering with trepidation, Origami continued on in a flat mechanical tone.

“There are no problems. I have experience as well in bathing alone between two people. I will not lose my calmness to something of this level.”

“What.....that was when you ambushed Shidou exactly when we came in!.....If you say it like that.....I have also.....”

“Fu—if it comes to bathing, you cannot exclude us Yamai.”

“Consent. There is a nice memory of Shidou being sandwiched by Yuzuru and Kaguya.”

“What, seriously.....?”

Then, the bridge suddenly transformed into a bathtub boasting tournament. Well, in part besides one person——

“That’s right. It’s the long-awaited onsen inn for nude socializing! In that case it’s better to have a narrower place! Such a huge opportunity! Inside the bathroom! Tightly squeezed together with Reine-san! It’s the world’s best lunchbox! I wouldn’t leave anything not gobbled up!”

There was one Spirit alone in her excitement.

“Ah——calm down already.”

In fact, when considering the number of times bathing with Shidou, as his younger sister, Kotori would be the undisputed winner for the most times. However, wishing to deviate from the topic, Kotori chose to remain silent.

Regardless of the direction of the topic, Kotori also held the same opinion. While it was certainly feasible that sudden mixed bathing with Reine would spark resistance, but in their prudence there should be a swimsuit prepared inside their luggage.

“——Shidou its ②. Let’s use the open-air bath.”

“.....Roger that.”

Upon hearing Kotori’s instructions, Shidou answered back in a soft voice that only the bone conductor type transmitter could pick up.

The instructions issued down from <Fraxinus>. While it was certainly an aggressive attack—he couldn’t move forward if he shrank back here. If he were at on the bridge himself, he would have likely chosen the same option.

Shidou took in a deep breath as he felt his heart tuning out a violent rhythm. Then, he turned to face Reine.

“Reine-san, since it’s so rare to come here, do you want to soak in the open-air bath before going to lunch?”

“.....Eh? It’s fine. But I didn’t bring a change of clothes.”

“No problem.”

Shidou gave a thumbs up as he opened the trolley suitcase he brought along.

From inside, there were two small Boston bags.

“.....This is?”

“One is mine and the other is prepared for Reine-san. Inside there are cosmetics, replacement clothes, a mixed bathing suit. Since the size should match——”

Having spoken that far, Shidou suddenly stopped.

Although it was good to show off to the best of his ability, Shidou noticed that his boasts and actions were beginning to undergo quite a dangerous metamorphosis.

“.....Uhh, don’t get me wrong. The clothes were prepared after talking with Maria. So I didn’t pick it directly or investigate the size.....”

“.....Ah, I didn’t think so.”

As Reine spoke, Shidou let out a quick sigh.

“.....Then again, you asked Maria? I wonder if you were scolded by her.”

“.....Ah, yes. I got an ample amount of that from her.”

Shidou forced a smile as sweat dripped down his cheeks.In truth, there was no concealment or lies to what he had said just now.

“.....Alright, let’s get in. I wonder if we can use the hotel’s towels. I haven’t soaked in a hot springs in a long time, so I’m looking forward to it.”

After saying that, Reine began to slowly undress.

Seeing those movements done without the slightest hesitation, Shidou’s eyes could help but flare open in a “Wow!” like motion.

“R-Reine-san, please wait a minute. I’ll head over there.....!”

“Huh? But I don’t care that much.....”

Despite the frightening level of laxness in Reine's tone, he shouldn't be watching her change. Shidou grabbed the Boston bag containing his own belongings and hurried to the wider corridor and closed the paper sliding door shut.

"Even though it's obvious that you'll be taking a bath together later, what's the use of being ashamed?"

"That's not it. Even though we'll be bathing together, that'd be with swimsuits on.....as expected, you shouldn't be watching someone else undress."

After responding to Kotori's voice, Shidou wiped the sweat from his back as he took out his swimsuit from his bag and quickly changed his clothes.Since the automatic camera should still be rolling, he also covered his waist with a towel just in case.

Soon afterwards, he heard Reine's voice come from the other side of the door.

".....Shin, can I open the door?"

"Ah, yes. Go ahead."

In order to enter the open-bath, one had to walk into the corridor where Shidou was presently located. Shidou replied back while placing his folded clothes on the chair.

His voice fell just as the door pulled open——

"——What.....?"

The next moment, Shidou was left stunned as his breathing came to a standstill.

However, Shidou's complete and utter shock was also excusable. After all, what stood behind the paper sliding door was Reine's figure, without wearing a single thread of clothing on her other than a small towel.

Her white skin that had been hidden over by her dress and coat was now undoubtedly exposed to the open air.

Even the minuscule textures of her skin were being conveyed simply through a gaze: the gently-sloping but also rough body lines.

Beautiful. An excessively nude beauty. Before her beauty which aroused desire and excitement, it resembled more like divine reverence.

.....Well, of course. In the end, it was firstly not possible to not have a sense of excitement or desires emerge. In fact, that violent and majestic chest was now liberated from the restraint of clothes. Despite feeling rigid from the sight, Shidou couldn't avert his eyes away.

"....."

Shidou forgot to speak or even blink, his gaze completely raptured by that alluring figure.

“Wha.....”

“Th-this is.....”

—A commotion struck the bridge.

The reason was simple. As soon as the sliding door opened, the monitor faded to black as if the power had turned off.

However, it seemed to be neither a malfunction on <Fraxinus>’s part or something caused by a disturbance in radio waves. As proof of this, the other equipment was still operating fine as the audio continued to flow from the speaker unchanged.

“R-Reine-san.....?”

“.....What’s the matter, Shin?”

“That.....was the swimsuit in the luggage not there?”

“.....Hmm? I don’t understand. What’s wrong, there’s only the two of us here. Isn’t that right?”

“N-no, that.....”

“.....!?”

While listening to the conversation between Shidou and Reine on the bridge, the male crew members lined up.....all flaring up their ears in excitement.

“C-Commander!”

“Analytic Officer Murasame’s bare.....no, I can’t miss seeing an important scene like this!”

“Restore it now!”

Kawagoe, Mikimoto, and Nakatsugawa all shouted in unison. Although also part of the male lineup, Kannazuki seemed to have no interest in big breasts. Rather, in his stead, Miku screamed “Ha! What happened? I didn’t do anything and it broke!” as she tried to look at the back of her personal monitor. Of course, there was no sense in what she tried to do.

“—Maria?”

As Kotori ignored their voices, Maria’s voice came out from the speaker to respond to her.

“Yes. Our aim is only to make the Spirits fall in love. It would be wise to eliminate the possibilities that would make Reine feel displeased after the sealing.”

“Your appropriate forethought is much obliged.”

As usual, the ever cautious AI. Kotori replied back with a slight shrug from her shoulders. —Incidentally, Kotori’s personal monitor remained unchanged in displaying the scene. Despite

being the same gender, Reine's naked body being exposed without hesitation even caused Kotori to pause in breathing.Indeed, this was poison for the eyes.

“But!”

“We cannot understand the situation fully between the two from voice only!”

“There is the risk of misjudging!”

The male crew members unyieldingly refused to give up. Then, as if expecting this behavior, Maria replied back.

“Please rest assured.”

At the next moment, the main monitor and all of the personal monitors beside Kotori's began to light up once again.

For a moment, the faces of the male members and Miku lit up.....but then froze instantly right afterwards.

The reason was simple. Rather than the original image being projected there, it was a human type CG that traced the movements of the two. Incidentally, this came with clothes attached of course.

“With this you all should be able to grasp the movements of those two. Continue on with the capture.”

“.....Yes.”

Somehow, the mood for the male crew members plummeted as they dejectedly nodded.

As Kotori looked on at that pitiful sight, she pulled the microphone closer in order to give advice to Shidou, who was now flabbergasted in front of Reine.

“U-Uhh.....”

As Shidou felt his face flush deep-red, Kotori's voice interrupted from the communication device.

“—What are you cringing for, Shidou. Do you think such a thing can make Reine fall in love?”

“.....!”

Upon being told this, Shidou felt a quiver reach his shoulders.

Surely it was this rationale. The future of the Spirits was hanging on his shoulders. He could afford to stake his time being bashful right now.

“—That's right, since it's just the two of us.”

When deciding on his preparations, he turned the towel on his hands and took off the swimsuit in one swift motion.

Somehow he heard a sound rattling from the communication device, asking “Kotori, is having only CG really enough?” Despite hearing the familiar voice asking to disclose for a more open video feed, Shidou chose to ignore it for now.

“Well then, shall we?”

“.....Ah.”

Shidou and Reine lightly nodded to each other as they left the locker room. The winter chill that had been blocked by the glass doors enveloped their entire bodies.

After rinsing first with a bath, they soaked into the warm hot springs water.

“Ah.....”

“.....Hmm, the water is nice and warm and there’s a beautiful scenic view.”

“Yeah, there’s still some snow left.....!?”

While agreeing with what Reine had said, Shidou began to look around at the scenery —before being struck by another coughing fit once again.

The reason was simple. Compared to the surrounding scenery, Reine’s breasts floating above the surface of the bath was much more eye-catching.

Perhaps noticing from the direction of Shidou’s gaze and his reaction, Reine slowly looked down before returning back to eye level.

“.....Ah, sorry. They always float somehow.”

“Eh.....that’s a pretty good point.”

Although Shidou didn’t know what he was doing or saying, he still knew that it was a blessing to behold such a beautiful sight as he subconsciously pressed his hands together. Despite having said that, after hearing an incoming cough come from Kotori, Shidou quickly corrected his seating posture.

Returning back to topic, the two of them were alone in the open-air bath. Besides the sounds of hot water being continually poured into the bathtub and the swaying of nearby trees, everything was intervened by a silence. There was only the transparent pool water separating them. If one desired to shorten distance, there was perhaps no better suitable location than here. Well, if there was no intimacy to begin with, it would have been impossible to soak in a hot springs like this.

While struggling to hold down the palpitations striking his chest, Shidou tried to speak as naturally as possible.

“—That reminds me, Reine-san. How long have you been working for <Ratatoskr>?”

“.....Ah, that’s right. It’s been 5 to 6 years from now. Roughly the same time Kotori took over as commander.”

“I see.....how to say this, thank you.”

“.....What are you talking about?”

Listening to what Shidou had said, Reine slanted her head in curiosity.

“No, for always having supported Kotori. For her—Kotori, it must have been difficult at that time.”

There was no falsehood here distorting Shidou’s true feelings. Kotori was discovered by <Ratatoskr> immediately after being turned into a Spirit. During that period, having someone worthy of relying on was an invaluable existence.

.....Well, the story wasn’t that simple, since it was Mio who had made Kotori into a Spirit.

“.....I haven’t done anything significant. She would have made a great commander even without me.”

“Well, I can’t deny that Kotori still would have been great.”

As Shidou pretended to jokingly comment, he heard a small burst of sound coming through the communicator.

“What did you do before then?”

“.....Before then? You ask a strange question.”

After listening to Shidou’s question, accompanied by the sound of dripping water, Reine turned over her gaze. However, Shidou continued to inquire without escaping from that gaze.

“—Yes. I would like to know more about Reine-san. Now that I think about it carefully, I don’t know anything about you.”

“.....”

Hearing what Shidou had just asked, Reine remained silent for a while before letting out a sigh.

“.....There’s nothing worth mentioning from my past.”

“That’s fine. Even so, I still want to know.”

As a result of Shidou inquiring so earnestly, Reine began to reply while averting her eyes downward.

“.....Before that, I was just a regular student. There’s nothing special worth mentioning. One day, I was scouted by <Ratatoskr>. It seems that a paper I wrote about spacequakes was very popular with the higher ups.”

“No, I feel that is already different from being normal.....was this during college or high school? After all Reine-san right now.....”

“.....It’s not refined to enquiry about a woman’s age.”

From the tone in her voice, Shidou knew he couldn’t push the topic any further. Shidou shrugged his shoulders as he let out a wry smile.

Well, since Reine was a Spirit, Shidou was conscious that age was not that really significant.

Reine was a very alert Spirit. Before entering <Ratatoskr>, she must have faked her resume in order to survive the rigorous screening process. Consequently, she must have prepared a family register or experience from education.

Everything for the sake of meeting with Shidou once more as an unrelated person.

At the same time, while also waiting nearby for Shinji’s awakening.

—For this sake, she created a new life as “Murasame Reine”.

“.....”

This awareness of that misery and grief caused Shidou’s chest to feel sore. The memory of Shinji within himself tried to raise a scream.

The grief Mio felt when he died and the path she took on since then. When thinking about that, tears inevitably leaked from his face. Not wanting this to be noticed, Shidou splashed some water on his face.

“.....Shin?”

“.....I want hear more about it. Reine-san’s—old stories. Can you tell me?”

“.....There’s nothing wrong with that.”

Shidou questioned with an awkward smile. Although Reine looked a little confused, she still answered back.

When she was young both of her parents had died. There were a few good memories of some close friends. She belonged to the department of science during her school days. Because of her pale face and lack of sleep, she had an old nickname of being called a vampire—

Despite there being some exaggerated jokes, this was undeniably the history of a human being that was not—”Takamiya Mio”.

“.....So then, this type of story. —Is it boring?”

“No.....there’s no such thing. There’s.....no such thing.”

Shidou continued to shake his head.

This was not boring, not at all. Rather, he wanted to hear more about her life story.

Especially—one. There was one point in particular Shidou especially wanted to ask. An important detail omitted from Reine's story just now.

“I have one last question.....is it alright to ask?”

“.....Un, what do you want to ask?”

As Reine urged him to continue, Shidou kept staring directly at her.

“Reine-san—do you have anyone that you like?”

“.....”

Hearing what Shidou had asked, Reine was speechless for a brief moment.

Although the changes in facial expression were minimal, there was something different in Reine's appearance than before.

But after this lasted for a few seconds, she soon returned back to her previous demeanor before continuing on.

“.....Unfortunately, there were no love affairs to talk about. But——”

Reine slowed down as she raised her head.

“.....That's right. There was only one person.”

“——”

Shidou held his breath at what Reine had said.

“Only one.” Needless to say, the object of her affection was not someone she loved as “Reine”—it was easy to infer that she was referring back to Shinji.

The remorse of Mio continuing to remain shackled and the delight that she was still thinking about him to this day. These conflicting emotions swirled inside Shidou's mind.

While suppressing Shinji's memories, Shidou asked back with trembling voice.

“Who is this——”

“.....”

Then.

As if to interrupt Shidou's words, Reine placed an index finger against Shidou's lips.

“Huh.....?”

“.....It’s not fair that I’m the only one talking about the past. Would you mind letting me hear your story as well?”

“Oh.....um.”

Due to the imposing manner of the demand, Shidou helplessly widened his eyes in surprise.

A misdirection Reine cunningly used to divert the conversation.....but although she was certainly right since he was the only one inquiring since they first began. With that in mind, Shidou nodded in response to Reine’s request.

“Even if I say more.....hasn’t <Ratatoskr> already thoroughly investigated me?”

Shidou swayed his shoulders with a dry smile on his face. Yes, information about Shidou had been thoroughly checked by <Ratatoskr> without his knowledge. It was to the extent that the word “personal privacy” had been deleted from his dictionary now. Perhaps, there was information that he even didn’t know about himself now stored in <Fraxinus>’s database.

However, Reine slowly shook her head.

“.....That’s just a list of words, only external facts.”

In truth, Shidou thought that should be enough.....although it apparently seemed to differ for Reine. She continued to speak in a quiet tone.

“.....I am also the same; I also want to ask about your past.”

“My.....past?”

“.....Yes. Do you remember—what happened to you before being adopted into the Itsuka family?”

As soon as he was told this, Shidou’s eyebrows twitched slightly upward.

For a moment, he thought that the knowledge of him holding the memories of Shinji had been exposed to the other party.

However, looking at Reine’s appearance, he quickly understood that was not the case. Reine’s restless eyes were looking at him with pure curiosity and interest.

“.....”

Therefore, while temporarily ignoring his memories as Shinji, he answered back within the range he remembered as Shidou.

“.....To be honest, even though I can’t remember clearly, I remember the feeling of being embraced by a warm pair of hands.....and then the feeling of losing the touch from those hands leaving somewhere.....from only that, I think it was my mother.”

“.....”

As Shidou, not in the least falsely manner replied back, Reine remained silent for a while before continuing to speak.

“.....Do you hate your mother for abandoning you?”

“Eh.....?”

Hearing that sudden question caused Shidou’s eyes to widen.

However, perhaps that question should have been considered a matter of course.

The person named Itsuka Shidou was reborn by Takamiya Mio using Takamiya Shinji as a source through the power of the Spirits. In other words, Shidou’s mother was no other than Reine. Needless to say—it was unlikely that Reine knew Shidou was already aware of this.

Shidou, while thinking back to the 17 years —while recalling the life of Itsuka Shidou so far, uttered a reply.

“I don’t hold a grudge.....”

“.....Huh. Is that so?”

Listening to what Shidou had said, Reine replied back. The tone of her voice was overflowing by both exuberant interest and a somewhat level of ease.

“.....Yes. Certainly when I was first adopted by the Itsuka family, I was always crying and fainting. But I think that was because of my own fondness to my mother. And.....I still remember how gentle it felt with her hands holding me.”

“.....”

“—So I think mother must have had a difficult time abandoning me. She couldn’t have been someone who willingly wanted to throw me away. For someone like that.....I can’t hate her.”

“.....I see.”

Reine, as if relishing what Shidou had said, lowered her eyes down.

Shidou then scratched his face and interjected with a “.....well”.

“If possible, I hope she can embrace me again.....although I’d think it would strange to do that at this age.”

“.....Hmm.”

Reine breathed in a light sigh of relief as she placed her hand against her chin in thought. Then, she waved his hand, beckoning Shidou to come closer.

“.....Come here, Shin.”

“.....Huh?”

Faced with the sudden invitation, Shidou was left shocked. Reine then pulled his hand, drawing him closer.

Then, she wrapped his hand around his back, tightly embracing him.

“.....Good boy, good boy.”

With the soft feeling of her hands touching his back, Shidou felt his face flush bright red.

“Wait.....Reine-san!?”

“.....Nothing to be surprised about, it feels a little bit better, right? —Although I don’t think I can replace your mother at all.”

“Reine-san.....”

As Shidou called out her name, he felt strength leave his stiffened body.

Warm water and a gentle embrace. The feeling was—exactly as he remembered in his distant memories.

“.....”

From this small feeling, Shidou gently bit into his lips.

As he thought—of course.

The words he heard from Mio were once again raised into his mind.

The ten months he had spent together with Reine passed through his mind.

—Mio was neither a ruthless killer nor a frantic slaughterer.

She was concerned about Shidou, had pity for the Spirits, and mourned for those sacrificed. Her actions, words, and voice were all filled with a degree of tenderness and love.

However—in order to reunite with Shinji again, she had decided to be willing to sacrifice anything in order to achieve that goal.

Indeed, how—sorrowful.

Her grievous resolution, her decision to walk into that field of carnage, Shidou felt the illusion of his chest being torn asunder.

“_____”

But—no, that was why.

If there was a possibility in stopping her—then he had to bet everything on that.

Shidou let out his voice while returning back the hug.

“—Reine-san.”

“.....Un, what is it Shin?”

As Reine’s voice lingered in his ear, Shidou made up his mind as he continued to speak.

“Later.....I have something I want to show you. Can you accompany me?”

“.....?”

Despite the incredulous look on her face, Reine nodded as if saying of course.



The market values of European enterprises were ranked from top to bottom. Despite the subtle variations depending on the year, DEM would never fallout from the single digits.

DEM—Deus Ex Machina Industries.

This super organization was involved in a wide range of developmental projections including the manufacturing of arms, aircraft, vehicles, ships, space development, semiconductors, electronic equipment, fiber industry and even travel agencies. Furthermore, the enterprise, with its wide range of affiliated companies and R&D projects, can be said that half of the residents of European countries lived under its grace.

However, even that number did not consider taking into consideration the real developmental result behind DEM—the Realizer Manifestation Device and the accompanying CR-Unit. In other words, that was just the tip of the iceberg.

A private enterprise that had enough wealth to buy a small country and possessed the means of turning such behavior into reality. Like its name suggested, it was an overwhelming and tyrannical grey giant. The castle built by the Magician Isaac Westcott.

—On one corner of such an enormous organization, such a glimpse can be seeing in the hanger of the aircraft. DEM second executive manager Ellen Mathers was wearing a suit made by DEM, holding up a sports bottle made by DEM, and onboard an aircraft produced by DEM.

DSS-063 <Lemegeton>. It was a new battleship of DEM and their flagship in the upcoming battle against <Ratatoskr>.

Its rough silhouette was a bit too plain for Ellen’s taste—but that was not important right now. What was required now was a robustness needed to protect Westcott in its belly and a violent power need to turn <Ratatoskr> into dust in the air.

Ah—but it couldn’t be helped. Ellen clenched her fist while straining her eyes.

If <Ratatoskr> knew that DEM would attack them with all of their power, there was no doubt that he would appear.

“.....”

The head of <Ratatoskr>’s decision making body, the chairperson of the Round Table, Elliot Woodman. Only that person, Ellen had to personally cut down.

That’s right. Only that man, who had betrayed Ellen and her compatriots.

“.....”

In that moment, Ellen felt her vision get a little blurry, so she wiped her eyes with her sleeves.

Was it because of the excitement from finally having the chance to have her revenge fulfilled, or was it due to so much concentration that she had forgotten to blink. Although she didn’t quite understand the reason herself, but if her subordinates saw this scene they would surely misunderstand. Ellen gently shook her head a little before taking a drink of the beverage within the sports bottle.

“—Ellen.”

At that moment.

Having heard someone unexpectedly calling out her name, Ellen lowered the bottle and turned around.

For a moment, she thought it was a crew member or Wizard on the airship—but that wasn’t right. There were only two people who would call her by her first name. The first would be her colleague Artemisia Ashcroft and the other was—

“Ike.”

After recognizing the identity of the person who appeared, Ellen called out his name.

The man over there had dusky blonde hair reminiscent of abandoned metal and a pair of eyes reflected with a rusted hue. Throughout the vicissitudes of life to old age, to the end of prosperity—this man gave the impressing of such a feeling.

Isaac Westcott. An inheritor of the mysteries and a blood descendent of the magicians—the man who establish DEM within a single generation.

“What’s wrong, for you to come to such a place?”

Although she had asked this question, Ellen could vaguely guess why he had come here.

With the decisive battle against <Ratatoskr> tomorrow, perhaps he couldn’t remain standing idly in his office and ran here specifically to see the main ship for tomorrow’s battle. Despite now being an industrialist required by the world, his natural curiosity remained unchanged.

However, the next words that came out of Westcott's mouth were completely beyond Ellen's expectations.

“—Prepare, Ellen. Immediately.”

As Westcott excitedly spoke, Ellen wrinkled her brow in confusion.

“Prepare?”

“Ah, yes. The situation has changed. No—it's strange to say it like this, but apparently it will be changing from now on.”

Westcott continued on like an excited child.

“Fuhahahahahahaha. Who could ever think that it would be like this? I'm truly lucky after all. I never would have thought that having the first Demon King in my hands, <Beelzebub>, would lead to this fateful arrangement.”

“Ike.....? What are you talking about? What is this preparation?”

As Ellen asked, Westcott answered back with a thin smile.

“The magic powered furnace. And I also need the accumulation charm.”

“.....!?”

Hearing what Westcott had said, Ellen unexpectedly choked.

But that was understandable. After all, the things that Westcott just mentioned existed for the purpose of performing that.

“What do you mean, Ike? What the hell happened?”

As Ellen asked in confusion, Westcott kept his smile undisturbed.

“It's not what happened. But rather what's going to happen next.

—Come, Ellen. Let us change the future.”



“Yah.....this is my first professional massage. It's a pleasing feeling.”

“Ah, yes. The stiffness of the shoulders feels lighter. The sake manjū sold near the hotel also tastes so good. I didn't think steaming would cause such a big difference in taste.”

“That's right! Tohka and the others would be happy if we bring some to them.”

“Fu.....shouldn’t today be kept a secret from the Spirits?”

“Ah.....that’s right.”

Listening to what Reine had said, Shidou let out an awkward laugh—but then continued with an “ah” exclamation as if noticing something.

“Reine-san, there are steps here, so please be careful.”

“.....Un, thank you for the reminder.”

Heeding Shidou’s warning, Reine sharply lifted her legs, verifying the condition of the ground before landing her feet and resuming their walk

While such caution may seem overly excessive, it was also to be expected given their current situation.

Since right now Reine had closed her eyes and relied on Shidou’s hand as a guide.

That’s right. After taking a dip in the open-air bath and enjoying the various facilities in the hotel, Reine was now being guide to the place that Shidou wanted to show her.

“.....Speaking of which, what did you want to show me? It feels that we’ve been walking for a while now.”

“You’ll recognize it once you see it.....but I think you’ll be excited for it.”

“.....Hmm, then I’m looking forward to it.”

Reine made a small nod as she continued to walk while relying on Shidou’s hand.

From this sensation, Reine remembered a nostalgic feeling.

Having something to show her and requesting her to close her eyes for a while—this request was exactly the same as from thirty years ago during Mio’s first date with Shinji.

Was the memory of Shinji influencing Shidou’s personality? Or since Shidou was just like Shinji, it was reasonable having the same idea? When Shidou made this request, despite not displaying it on her face, it was very shocking for her.

Thinking back—today had been one surprise from another.

Last night, when remembering how today’s events began with Shidou’s sudden invitation to a date, the idea had passed through Reine’s mind.

While suddenly invited to a date, it was unexpected that their destination was a ryokan, and even more surprising that Shidou wanted to hear stories about her past.

Perhaps there was a change in Shidou’s mental state. Or he wanted to eliminate the usual doubts and desires plaguing himself before the upcoming battle against DEM.

If that was the reason was the former, then the memory of Shinji sleeping within Shidou may be the cause.

The powers of many Sephira Crystals were already inside his body. Leaving behind only, Nia's Sephira Crystal which was stolen by Isaac Westcott and Tokisaki Kurumi's. Indeed, when Shidou's reiryoku went rampant, the memories of Shinji appeared on the surface level for just a moment.

If that was the case, then the reason was simple. Just as Mio couldn't forget about Shinji, Shinji was destined to always fall in love with Mio. It was only natural that such a result was achieved.

However, if that was not the reason.

That is to say, in the latter case—if Shidou had been interested in Reine since the beginning, Reine couldn't help but feel uneasy.

—Itsuka Shidou was a provisional personality that would one day become Takamiya Shinji.

—Murasame Reine was a temporary disguise for Takamiya Mio.

In other words, this was rendezvous between mutual counterfeits.

Even though this moment was pleasant, it was obvious that there was no happy ending ahead.

Since Shidou's personality will be completely removed after he gained all of the power.

And putting this into practice—would be unprecedented for Reine.

“Reine-san.”

“——”

Just as Reine was pondering in silence, Shidou's voice interrupted her thoughts.

For a moment, she thought that her thoughts had leaked out to Shidou—but that wasn't it. The subsequent words quickly spread to her ear.

“We're here now. It's fine to open your eyes.”

“.....Un——”

It seemed that they have finally arrived at their destination. Reine slowly opened her eyes.

And then——

For a moment, she was rendered speechless.

She was taken aback by the magnificent scene spread before her eyes.

The first thing that catches the eye was the inexhaustible horizon and the sunlight sparkling against the watery surface.

An elegant melody was played as the white sand accompanied the steady tide.

The sound of seagulls. The aroma of the beach shore. Considering her sense of sight and smell were not hindered, she should have been able to infer it from that alone. But perhaps she was left unaware due to being too focused in her thoughts. As a result, everything information constructing this beautiful scenery struck Reine's senses all at once.

—The ocean.

That's right. Reine and Shidou were now standing at a location overlooking the coastline. Looking at the sights around the ryokan, it looked to be in the mountainside, but the backside apparently seemed to be connected to the coast.

However—that wasn't all that surprised Reine.

“.....”

Goosebumps trembled against her skin the moment she realized that fact.

No doubt. It was impossible to be a mistake.

The place the two of them were now was not just the coast—

It was the same shore that Shinji had brought Mio thirty years ago.

Thump. Thump. His heartbeat was at a violent rhythm. The fierce agitation of his chest almost gave the illusion of his entire body shaking. Blood was circulating through his body at a higher speed and his body temperature began to elevate.

But all of this was understandable.

After all, Shidou right now—had just brought Reine to the same ocean from Mio's memories.

This was undoubtedly a double-edged sword. Showing her this ocean view would definitely warrant suspicion of Shidou holding Shin's memories.

No, not only that. If she realized that Shidou had traveled back from the future, then everything would fall apart at that moment. In fact, when deciding upon the location for the date, this factor had been the most divisive point.

But—even so, Shidou still choose this place.

This date was for the purpose of sealing Reine's reiryoku.

In other words, he would only be victorious if he succeeded in surpassing Shinji's position in Reine's heart.

Of course, it may seem suicidal to bring Reine to a place involving her memories of Shinji. Such an opinion was brought forward during the meeting with the Spirits.

However, Shidou thought differently.

If he escaped from the most important memory in her heart, then there was no way that Shidou could ever surpass Shinji.

No—saying surpass would be inappropriate.

Undoubtedly, no matter what Shidou did, the tide from thirty years ago would never fade away from her heart.

Therefore, Shidou must accompany together with Shinji's existence in order to make Reine fall in love.

“.....”

This was a gamble where a single mistake could risk everything collapsing.

However, Shidou firmly believed that this was the only way to ensure that everyone survived.

Mio loves Shinji. That was impossibly to deny. Her feelings of love in this world were like a raging fire that was difficult for others to even catch glimpse of.

Even so, the time that Reine had shared with Shidou and the Spirits—none of that was false.

“.....”

As Reine slowly turned from looking at the coast to him, Shidou felt so nervous that it seemed his insides were contorting into a ball.

“.....Shin, where is this?”

However, Reine's tone was still very calm.

He could only imagine what was going through her mind at this moment. But for now, it seemed that she had accepted this scenery for the time being. Despite secretly feeling relieved at this, Shidou replied back while paying attention not to let too much emotion show on his face.

“Yes. This is the place that I wanted to show Reine-san. —Isn't it pretty?”

“.....Ah, it's beautiful.....very much so.”

Looking back at the coastline, Reine replied with deep emotion.

Shidou nodded back as he reached out to her hand once again.

“Do you want to walk a little?”

“.....Ah, gladly.”

Reine expressed a faint smile as she took Shidou's hand.

".....Un, really—it's a beautiful place. It may sound cliché, but it feels like my heart is being washed away."

"Haha, you're exaggerating too much. But more than anything, I'm glad you like it."

".....But why did you invite me here?"

"Reine-san may like this place, that's what my instincts told myself."

".....If that's the case, then your intuition is very sharp."

The two then conversed while making gentle steps walking along the shore.

The ocean she once seen with Shinji.

Even in a day full of surprises, this ranked number one among everything.

—Coincidence? Inevitable? Was it because of Shinji's lingering memories? No, since Shidou was just like Shinji, it shouldn't be too surprising—these various speculations ran through Reine's mind.

However, Reine quickly realized that these thoughts shouldn't be spoken right now.

For a while, Reine continued to talk with Shidou while leaving footprints on the sandy beach.

The contents of the conversation were unremarkable. The topic quickly changed from the ocean, school, tomorrow, Kotori being overworked, Kannazuki should work a little harder, the new limited cream puff from La Pucelle in front of the station, and Shidou promising that he absolutely won't die tomorrow.....and etc. Really, the contents were nothing to write home about.

But—this made Reine feel comfortable.

To speak of extremes, it didn't matter what was the topic of the conversation.

Exchanging words while walking together on this ocean of memories.

Just that alone—was enough.

As time passed, the sun that once illuminated the ocean began to sink into the horizon, as the colors of the evening began to coat the surroundings.

Reine and Shidou sat by the bank of the shore while listening to the surging waves of the tide.

“.....Shin.”

“Yes.”

“.....Hmm, what was I going to say?”

“Haha.....what happened?”

As Shidou laughed, Reine gently raised the corners of her lips.

The sound of the refreshing waves and the gentle cold breeze. But none of that compared to the warmth felt from Shidou’s hand. And also—that certain heartbeat.

From that, Reine felt a mysterious feeling.

How to explain it? Her mind began to blur as it became more difficult to move her limbs. But it was definitely not a bad feeling. It was so comfortable being embraced by that warm hand that her consciousness gradually began to dissolve.

“.....Hmm.....”

As she noticed it was the first time in thirty years that she began to doze off, Reine’s consciousness sank into the darkness.



“.....Reine-san?”

Shidou let out a startled voice as he found Reine unexpectedly leaning against his shoulder.

From the looks of it, Reine had closed her eyes while lightly breathing. It seemed that she had fallen asleep.

Well, it was not wonder she was like this. After all, she had been accompanying him throughout the entire day since early morning. Presumably, it must have been very tiring.

“How rare, I’d never imagine Reine to fall asleep in public.”

“Is that so?”

Surprised by Kotori’s voice being suddenly heard through the communicator, Shidou lowered his volume in order to not wake up Reine.

However, truth be told, this was the first time Shidou had seen Reine asleep as well. Perhaps they were witnessing an extremely rare sight.

“But it’s a pity. We’d have finally reached the sealable threshold. It would be a great opportunity for a kiss.”

“Hey.....even if that’s the case, you can’t kiss someone who is asleep. It’s the sort of thing that has to be agreed by both parties, right?”

“Hey, that’s not every nice to Sleeping Beauty. Girls have longing to you know. —Of course, it all depends on the partner in question here.”

Kotori retorted back in half-joking manner. Although he couldn’t see her, there was the distinct impression of her shrugging her shoulders and twirling the Chupa Chups stick in her mouth.

Between this ongoing banter, Shidou felt a slight nudge from his shoulder. It seemed that Reine had woken up as she gently lifted up her head.

“Good morning, Reine-san.”

“.....”

Being greeted awake by Shidou, Reine blinked several times to shake of the drowsiness.



After a few seconds, she widened her eyes after finally sorting out the situation.

“.....Now way, just now I——”

“Yes. You were sleep.Even though I said that, it was only a little just for about 5 minutes.”

“.....”

Listening to what Shidou had said, Reine began to check her forehead and cheeks after falling silent for a while. —As if confirm if there were traces of fears and sweat.

“Reine-san.....?”

“.....”

As Shidou tilted his head in curiosity over this, Reine breathed out a small sigh.

And then, her breathing continued to gradually get heavier.

“.....Fufu, hahahahaha.....”

It was—the sound of laughter.

This wasn't unusual of itself. When people feel amused, cheerful, happy—or even bashful, it would be natural to use this to express their emotions.

However, after hearing this, Shidou could only stare blankly at the sight.

The reason was simple. So far, Shidou had never heard Reine laugh before.

The same was true for Kotori and the others. From the other side of the communicator, he could hear the sounds of a breathtaking sigh.

“.....Like this, I actually fell asleep. Haha.....I see, this is really convincing.....”

Reine didn't seem to notice Shidou's reaction—no; it was more like she couldn't stop laughing. As she continued to laugh, she placed her hand against Shidou's shoulder.

“.....I have to thank you. I haven't slept so peacefully in such a long time. It seems that your shoulders are really comfortable.”

Reine spoke softly with a gentle smile.

Shidou narrowed his breath. Reine's beauty already had a far-reaching influence. When coupled with a bit of tenderness, it instantly reached a breathtaking charm.

Then, at the next moment—

“.....! Shidou!”

Kotori’s voice, marked by both excitement and fretfulness, rang through to his eardrum.

“There’s a positive change in Reine’s mental state as well as a favorability response! Now is the time!”

“.....!”

Listening to what Kotori had said, Shidou swayed his brow upward in alarm.

He thought that no chance would come decided at this timing. But it seemed exposing her sleeping state to someone else had significant meaning for Reine.

However, being impatient now would be taboo. Just because he had reached the sealable threshold, pressing forcibly forward would only incur a sharp decline in mood afterwards.

Then, what he needed to do now—

“.....”

While thinking of this, Shidou let out a sudden sigh.

Yes, so far it had only been the pre-preparation stage. Shidou had not clearly conveyed his intentions to Reine yet.

“—Reine-san.”

Shidou quietly called out her name. Having regained her calm demeanor, she likely noticed the change in atmosphere as she looked back him.

“.....Un, what’s wrong, you suddenly look more solemn.”

“No.....it’s about when we were in the open-air bath.”

“.....Ah, rest assured, I’ll keep it secret from everyone.”

“That’s not it.....no, I would want you to keep it a secret.....”

Shidou scratched his face as he tried to regain his momentum.

“The story of—the person Reine-san liked.”

“.....What about then?”

Reine tersely replied back after a momentary pause.

“Shidou then looked directly at Reine’s eyes with a determined look.

“—So, is it hopeless?”

“.....”

Hearing what Shidou said, Reine responded back with silence.

But her eyes did not reveal either rejection or disgust.

Among there was hesitation and confusion. And also a little bit of—guilt.

Shidou continued to rush forward with this momentum in hand.

“I don’t expect to replace or let you forget about that person. But.....I want to be myself, in a different way from that person; to become someone who can cherish Reine-san.....is that alright?”

“.....”

Reine was left undecided towards this.

However, even after placing his hand on her shoulder, it didn’t seem like she would refuse.

“Reine-san——”

“.....Shin. I——”

Reine was just about to say something.

But as Shidou’s face suddenly approached, she lessened her lips and closed her eyes.

Their breathing became in sync.

The sounds of each other’s heartbeats were clearly audible in each other’s ears.

——The two lips touched.

By the ocean colored by the burning sunset.

Shidou and Reine——exchanged the kiss that Shinji and Mio couldn’t thirty years ago.

“——We did it!”

One the bridge while staring at the main monitor, Kotori could help but unintentionally stretch out a victory pose.

On the display, there was an image of Shidou and Reine hugging and kissing under the sunset. It looked like a scene right out of a movie.

Just like Kotori, the Spirits that saw this scene displayed a variety of different response. Tohka, Mukuro, and Yuzuru looked on while completely engrossed, Kaguya and Natsumi tried to look

away, Yoshino was looking on between the opening made by her fingers covering her eyes, Origami stared expressionlessly, and Miku and Nia let out an incessant squeal—

Although the responses different from person to person, the Spirits were all told beforehand that wanting to stay on the bridge to support Shidou would mean perhaps watching a scene of the two of them kissing. Thanks to this, none of the Spirits reacted in an extremely flustered state.No well, Nia and Miku were acting flustered in another sense.

Anyway, the kiss was a success. Kotori looked at the numerical values at the edge of the screen. The likability value was in the sealable area. With this condition met, sealing Reine's reiryoku could be—

“.....!? Commander!”

But at that moment.

Accompanied by a loud alarm, the crew member's voice shook Kotori's eardrums.

It felt like the illusion of time standing still. A supreme euphoria flooded his mind. The memory of Shinji within his heart naturally caused him to place more strength in holding onto Reine's shoulders.

Long. Too Long. It took too much time in order to hug Mio this way.

Shidou struggled to suppress such burning emotions. He was not Takamiya Shinji, but Itsuka Shidou. The longing coming from Shinji was so strong that if he didn't recognize it then, it would have completely overtaken his consciousness.

Eventually, as their lips touched each other, the warm feeling flowing into Shidou's body—

“——”

—It didn't come.

“.....”

Shidou held his breath.

Certainly, he had kissed Reine. There was also the feeling of a path being established.

However, when remembering the feeling of a Spirit's reiryoku being sealed, the flow of power being transferred did not occur.

—Why? While asking this to himself, the procedure shouldn't have been wrong. There wasn't an insufficient amount of positive favorability. Sure enough, was it because Shidou was born from the Spirit of Origin that he could seal Reine's reiryoku. Or was it—

“.....”

As Shidou's thought process fell into disarray, Reine slowly removed her lips from Shidou.

And then, while tracing her wet lips with her fingers, she let out her voice.

".....I see. You——have you seen the future?"

"——!?"

"Wha——"

Reine's words caused his shoulders to tremble. At the same time, the horror in Kotori's voice echoed through his skull.

".....What are you surprised about? It's not the first time that memories have been shared through the pathway."

As she spoke, Reine didn't deride or scold Shidou. Instead, she gently touched Shidou's head.

".....The many mysterious of today have finally been solved.Ah, no perhaps I'd already noticed it through the vagueness. I just didn't want to understand. Because I was very happy when you invited me on a date."

Reine continued to whisper to his ear in a gentle tone.

".....I really enjoyed myself, even enough to forget the painful past for a bit.

——But, dreams are things that will eventually wake up. Isn't that right——Shidou?"

Chapter 3: A Battlefield That Should Be Called Impossible

—Crying, crying, to the point where she couldn't tell how much she cried.

Choking, weeping, but even then the tears would not run out.

His existence meant everything to her. She felt alive by his presence. She once thought that it wasn't an exaggeration to say that she was born to meet him. —During the time spent with him, she had certainly thought so.

—Even though he died right in front of her, she still lived on like this.

This was something irresolvable for her to endure.

She tried to follow after him. She also even thought that it would be nice to disappear by his side.

However, her body as a Spirit was too resilient to allow for even such meager hopes.

No matter how much blood was spilled, lethal poison inhaled, or even attempts at suicide, her body would choose to continue to live regardless of her own will.

With her heart holding this despair, she could only live this long life without knowing how long it would take. For her, calling this hell would not be enough.

But——

“.....Already, its fine. Because you are here.”

The girl gently stroked her abdomen.

Although there was no even a slight bulge yet, but certainly—— a single life was alive there.

The reconstruction of a human who had died once. Perhaps it would take a reasonable amount of time, but she had infinite time.

A tiny light born from despair, but that alone was enough for her now.

“.....Fufu.”

The girl laughed without wiping away her tears as she gently touched her stomach.



“———Dou, Shidou!”

“.....!”

Upon hearing the call from the communication device, Shidou felt a tremble reach his shoulders.

Judging from the tone in Kotori's voice, she had been calling his name several times now. But it seemed he didn't noticed it for a couple of seconds, being caught staring in a daze over anticipating what Reine would do next.

"Ku——"

After recognizing the situation again, Shidou jumped back as if to escape Reine's grasp.

The memory of the future world. Shidou instantaneously moved back from being touched by Reine. If he were to about to have his memory as Shidou erased, it would be too dangerous to come in close contact with her now.

"....."

Reine didn't pursue him further or utter another word. She calmly looked at his actions while slowly standing up.

".....Hmm, it looks like I am hated. Although it's unavoidable when thinking of my work, but it's truly hard to bear being rejected by you."

Then, Reine muttered in a somewhat lonely manner. She looked like a girlfriend quarreling with her lover rather than a Spirit that could snap the world in half with a single finger.

".....I don't hate you. Rather, it's better to say that I want to hug and kiss you again."

Shidou replied without delay as he cautiously paying attention to Reine's every move.

Despite being said in a half-joking manner, it also reflected his true intentions without any lies. The memories of Shinji within Shidou had continued yearning for extending out his hand to Reine even now. As for Shidou himself, even after experiencing that future of despair, he still couldn't bring himself to hate Reine.

".....I am also. So unbearably and dearly in love with you. When I met you again, I would like you to praise me for resisting the urge to hug you."

"In that case I have a good idea. Let's reconcile here, with me and live together with the Spirits. Surely, it would be fun every day."

".....Ah, that really is an attractive offer. If I had met Shin, I would have certainly agreed to that."

Reine lightly sighed before continuing on.

".....But I can't. I have met Shin. I discovered love. There's no meaning in this world without Shin. There's no value to life without Shin. ——It's not false that I love the Spirits, but if it means meeting Shin again, I will throw that all away."

"....."

While hearing Reine soft words, the unwavering willing underneath that caused Shidou to tremble.

Shidou was already aware of Reine's staunch determination. In the future world, his body literally experienced that painful resolve firsthand. But when confronted by this once more, his skin shivered in fright.

As Shidou continued gazing at Reine, he started desperately thinking.

The strategy had failed. While the kiss was successful, it failed to seal Reine's reiryoku. What should be done next? What could he do? The opponent was the most powerful and lovely Spirit. Everything was meaningless in front of her. Even if he tried something to stop her—it wouldn't work. Moreover, the worst case scenario was that through the path—the memories of the future—had been shared. Struck by this unforeseen circumstance—he was out of options. Even if Shidou used the Sixth Bullet <Vav>—to travel back to the past—at that moment, she would not allow him the chance.

“.....Gu, ku—”

Shidou suddenly frowned.

Then, a sharp headache occurred intermittently as if to interrupt his thoughts.

For a moment, he thought it was something Reine had done—but that wasn't it. Reine also look confused at the sudden change in Shidou's tone.

And besides—he couldn't recognize this feeling.

The memory of Shinji invoked by Reine in the future world. It was the feeling of the memory of his other self that was straining across his brain. Right now Shidou felt something very close to that

However, the memory of Shinji should already have been recovered. If that were the case—

“.....!”

Shidou quickly placed his hand against his forehead.

The sound of a piercing alarm caused the tremor to reach his skull through the communication machine.

For a moment, Shidou thought it was an emergency warning caused by the urgent matter of detecting Reine's reiryoku.

However, this was different. Kotori's voice soon echoed from the communicator.

“—Shidou! It's DEM!”

“What.....!?”

A few seconds after that notice, Shidou saw—across the sky, there were several faint silhouettes at the edge of his sight.

At this distance, it could only be seen vaguely. But Shidou immediately recognized that it wasn't a migratory bird or airplane. Yes. It was—

“.....DEM's fleet?”

Reine muttered as she looked up at the same sky as Shidou.

Her voice was quiet and calm as usual, but the current Shidou could feel an endless enmity from the depth of that voice.

It was not unreasonable. For her, DEM was the foe that had snatched away her beloved Shinji.

“.....Originally, the decisive battle was supposed to be tomorrow. —is it <Beelzebub>? Because of your actions, history seems to have been rewritten.”

After Reine muttered to herself, she slowly looked down towards Shidou's direction.

“Well, what shall I do? In the future, it seems that I teleported you to the shelter so that you wouldn't get involved in this—”

“.....”

Hearing those words, his mind reflexively went on alert.

Looking at this sight, Reine let out a sigh.

“.....Not using that, although this will also be very difficult—”

—The moment that she said that.

A black line was drawn in that space as if to block out Reine's voice.

From the ground to Reine's head, it forcefully enveloped as if like a pen cartridge of ink thrown on a sheet of paper.

“What.....!?”

—Shidou was able to recognize this from the trajectory of the shadowy projectile. Reine stopped speaking as she gently swayed her head.

“.....Hmm.”

Reine bit against her lip as the shadowy bullet came to a stop. She looked at the ground—to be exact, at the shadow stuck there.

Then, at the next moment, several bullets erupted from the shadow and towards Reine. Reine kicked off the ground to leap backwards in order to avoid them.

A fierce barrage was deployed in the blink of an eye. There was a momentary delay for Shidou's eyes and mind to grasp the situation.

But then, he understood. —The source of this attack against Reine.

“Kurumi.....!?”

“——Kihhi, hihi.”

As Shidou called out that name, a girl appeared from the shadow while accompanied by her signature laugh.

Unevenly tied jet black hair from both left and right sides, an Astral Dress dyed in the color of blood and shadows, and a ticking golden clock engraved on her eye.

That's right. The Worst Spirit capable of manipulating both time and shadow, appeared standing between Shidou and Reine.

“Good day, Shidou-san. I'm glad to see that you're fine.”

Kurumi turned slightly to the side towards Shidou, giving him her usual smile. Seeing her like that, Shidou couldn't help but feel his throat tighten.

“Kurumi, why——!”

Mio was currently inside Kurumi. Shidou had already witness the scene of Mio crawling out of Kurumi's chest in the future world.

This information should have been passed to the real Kurumi through a clone. Kurumi can't win against Mio. Rather, it could be said that she had already been defeated. In that case, why would she——

“You're using ‘why’ to say hello. And I'm here to help you escape from this predicament. It's so sad that I'll be crying hearing you saying that.”

Not in the least having her feelings deeply hurt, Kurumi smiled in a jestful manner.

Then, while looking at this scene, Reine placed her hand against her chin while breathing out a “.....hmm” sigh.

“.....Kurumi. —So you've still dare to come. Welcome. Things will be quicker now that you are here.”

“——Ara, ara.”

Listening to Reine's words, Kurumi looked over in a grand gesture.

“That intolerable arrogance hasn't change a bit. Murasame-sensei——no, Mio-san? I was totally deceived. I would have never expected my enemy to be so close.”

Kurumi continued to play it like joke, but there was an unmistakable anger and resentment in that voice.

“Like I thought, it’s been quite a while since we’ve talked properly. —How have you been? I’ve always, always wanted to see you. For your rotten dream, how many bodies have you stepped on since then? Although I also want to do that, I’m still far behind Mio-san. Can you please tell me your secret?”

“.....”

Despite hearing Kurumi’s spiteful and sarcastic provocation, Reine didn’t even raise her brow. —As if already knowing her own sins best.

“.....There’s no way, did you’ve come here just to say that? You shouldn’t lack that foresight anymore.”

“Well, I wonder about that. Just catching wind of your face caused my short-temper to come out.”

“.....If that’s the case, then I don’t mind that.”

“Whatever the reason, within here, there are only two Sephira Crystals remaining, the one in Westcott’s possession and yours. Yes—this a sufficient stage to awaken Shin.”

“Now.....will it work out that well? —Let’s see!”

At the moment Kurumi howled, many girls with the same appearance as Kurumi emerged from the shadow surrounding Mio—clones created through <Zafkiel>.

“Kihihihihhi!”

“Now, now, come here.”

“Please pass on to the next life—!”

As they each cried out, they all pulled the trigger on the two guns carried by both hands. The pith-black bullets drew in the shadows as they bombarded Reine from all four directions.

No, at the moment of the bombardment, Reine kicked off against the ground, dancing into the air with such levity as if entering a zero-gravity space. The shadows bullets collided at Reine’s former location, sparking a violent explosion.

“Kih—!”

But that was also probably within Kurumi’s expectations. Kurumi suddenly raised her head. Then, as if to match that movement, her shadow expanded to the outer circumference as even more clones emerged.

Then, while targeting Reine who had escaped into the air, they fired an even larger hail of bullets all at once.

It seemed that the bullets were loaded with even more reiryoku than usual. The myriad of bullets converged onto a single point through exquisite control, causing a tremendous explosion.

But——after confirming the clean hit. Kurumi didn't relax, nor did she avert her eyes to where Reine was supposed to be.

Kurumi likely also understood. That something of this caliber shouldn't be able to defeat Reine.

As if to verify that idea, the black smoke coming from the shadows began to dissipate in the sky as a faint radiance began to illuminate the surroundings.

“Ah——”

Looking at this sight, Shidou could help but let his voice unintentionally leak out.

Over there, Reine was quietly floating while clad in an Astral Dress emitting a faint light.

Graceful and elegant, the Astral Dress worn by a Goddess. Behind her back, there were wings marked by ten stars whose colors have faded away. Although it was slightly different it was unmistakably the same as what Mio had worn in the future world.

——Spirit of Origin. <Deus>.

The Spirit bestowed with the name of God had now descended here.

“.....Although the order has been reversed a bit, it'll be fine. ——Return it to me, Kurumi. The Sephira Crystal in your body and my other half.”

“——Ha. I refuse.....!”

Kurumi let out a sharp scream as she danced into the sky. The clones that were deployed in the vicinity also slammed against the ground, chasing behind her.

Countless Kurumi and numerous bullets intermingled, dancing in the air. A terrible icy black gale blew around, not willing to let the survival of any creature roaming around.

However, unlike before, Reine didn't even turn around to avoid the bullets, remaining leisurely floating in the air.

But now that Reine had manifested her Astral Dress, she didn't even need to dodge Kurumi's bullets. Each attack contained a bullet imbued with a mighty power that ought to be enough to plunder life away, but everything that struck Reine's Astral Dress came to a halt in the sky.

“.....Come here, 'me'.”

Reine quietly spoke while slowly raising her hand as if beckoning someone.

Then, at that moment——

“.....Gah!?”

The nearby Kurumi clones suddenly groaned in agony as a white arm emerged out from her chest.

“Kurumi.....!”

Raising his voice to a scream, Shidou cried out Kurumi’s name.

It was the exact same sight he had seen in the future world. The despair of Kurumi, feared as the Worst Spirit, having had her life snatched away in an instant.

Shidou gritted his teeth. —Even though he had traveled back to the past in order to prevent this. Even though he had rewritten history in order to not witness this scene again. In the end, he was powerless in front of the Spirit of Origin—

—However.

“—Kihi, hi.....”

The next moment, Kurumi looked at the arm extending out from her chest.

It was small, but Kurumi certainly—laughed.

“.....”

Seeing her like this, Shidou took in a small gulp.

The look on her face was not that of self-resignation and yielding to despair.

Ah, that’s right. Moreover, Kurumi was not a superficial girl who would leave herself to take up such reckless actions. She would not give up even when faced with the slightest glimmer of hope; she would retaliate by preparing multiple layers of planning. It was because of that she lived on like this.

“I’ve been.....waiting.....for this moment—!”

Despite the agonizing pain, Kurumi fearlessly shouted while injecting strength into the arm holding the short pistol.

“<Zafkiel>—!”

In response to that, the shadow on the ground stretched out and was sucked into the muzzle.

With slightly trembling hands, lifted up the short pistol and aimed the muzzle at Reine—no, instead she pulled the trigger while aiming at her own forehead.

“Wha.....!?”

Bang, a dry sound echoed as the bullet collided against Kurumi’s head. The next moment, Kurumi’s body began to blur.

But—that was it. No other changes had occurred. Even though Kurumi gained the power from <Zafkiel>’s bullet, it didn’t land a hit against Reine or stop Mio from once again crawling out of her body.

—Truly abnormal, Kurumi had only attacked herself.

After that, the same scene he had already once seen before continued to unfold.

From Kurumi’s body, a naked girl had emerged—Mio. Kurumi, who had been reduced to a withered corpse, was casted aside like an empty shell. Then, as if following this act, all of Kurumi clones contorted in pain before fading away back into shadows.

“.....”

“.....”

As Reine and Mio’s gazes met, they both approached each other and embraced in a hug.

Their bodies let out a glow as their silhouettes gradually merged into one.

After the light ceased, Mio, who had the exact same appearance seen in the future world, reign over there.

“Mio—”

As Shidou blankly called out that name, Mio’s facial expression loosened as she suddenly smiled back.

“Un. It’s been quite a while since we’ve been together while I am in this form. —No, Shin has already seen me like this. It’s a bit of a headache.”

After saying that, Mio’s eyebrows twitched as if she had noticed something.

“Ah—”

Shidou noticed it as well. —Behind Mio, in a small portion of her Astral Dress, none of the ten stars were emitting a radiant glow.

Although his memory was a bit vague, when Mio first appeared in the future, the black star was already glowing. But now, no such thing had transpired. Despite not quite knowing what this phenomenon meant.....he could tell from Mio’s expression that it was an unexpected situation.

“.....Looks like this is Kurumi’s work. As one would expect from my dear friend.”

As Mio spoke in an earnest tone of admiration, she let out a brief sigh before raising her head.

“.....Mio—”

Shidou called out Mio’s name again—but at the next moment, he was overcome by a sharp headache, falling down on the spot.

“Shin.....?”

“Ga.....ahhh.....”

His vision began to flicker. The feeling of seeing an unknown scene began to mix with his subliminal consciousness.

This wasn't his own memory. It wasn't even the memories from Shinji. A girl's slender arm. Sadness. Despair. Laments. A small hope. Caressing the stomach. You must be—

Those fragmentary images fluttered in his mind. What was happening to himself was completely unclear.

But when he saw those fragmentary scenes—

“.....This is—”

As Shidou's mind speculated, a certain possibility was born.



Frustration and dismay, as well as a little bit of bafflement and lamentation, dominated the bridge of the aerial warship <Fraxinus>.

But this apprehension was not incomprehensible. After all, the seal for Reine that seemed to be successful at that moment had ended in failure, and also—

“DEM.....!”

The crew members at the lower level raised their voices, brimming with a sensation of trembling in fear.

That's right. A DEM aerial fleet suddenly appeared where Shidou and Reine were confronting each other.

“A sudden assault without issue the spacequake alarm? That's too much even for you guys.”

Kotori groaned in disgust with a grim expression on her face.

DEM Industries. Their enemy that aimed to kill the Spirits in order to gain their power.

However, this organization would ring a false spacequake alarm in order to clear out civilians when preparing for the large-scale battle. In fact, according to what Shidou had said, they should have used that method in the future world.

However, this time there was no such thing. If DEM had not made a mistake, there were only two possible reasons.

That is to say, even if taking the risk of witnesses and victims, they still wanted to seize this opportunity—likely they saw no fault in casualties as long as they overwrite the world.

“Tch——”

Kotori sank her teeth into the Chupa Chaps, leaving behind a large crack.

Nonetheless, the reasons for this irritation were no just limited to that.

—From the very beginning, “this” was a raid that should not be possible.

The reason was extremely simple. Today was still February 19th.

The date that DEM specified for the final battle was February 20th. Of course, it wasn’t as if they didn’t expect someone as cowardly as DEM to renege on this proposal, but even from the perspective of Shidou who had seen the future noted that DEM would do nothing on the 19th.

Needless to say, since Shidou and <Ratatoskr> have taken different actions than the original timeline, there was also no guarantee that DEM wouldn’t do the same.

However, this attack was too unnatural to say the least. If anything else—

“.....If my guess is correct, should I be a little bit happier?”

Kotori shrugged her shoulders in self-mockery as she let out a frustrated sigh.

Likewise, while sitting in the seat for the Analytic Officer, Nia caressed her chin while marking her expression with a sullen face.

But that was normal as well. —After all, this was her ability originally.

“——<Beelzebub>.....looks like it.”

Nia groaned with a complicated look on her face.

That’s right. <Beelzebub>. The inverted form of Nia’s Angel <Rasiel> and the Demon King plundered by Westcott.

The Demon King, in the form of an enormous book, that can “know” everything in this world. Although it’s search precision had been weakened due to Nia’s jamming, the possibility that Westcott was aware of their movements was not zero.

“Even if he didn’t notice from boy’s timeline, he should be able to guess to a certain extent by peeking into our conversations. If there’s even a little bit of doubt, then he’ll be able to trace those clues back to the source.”

Nia shrugged her shoulders in a grandiose gesture.

Nonetheless, Kotori, Nia, and of course Shidou were all well aware of the dangers.

Even after understanding that point, Shidou still told everyone about the future.

Information sharing and elaborate meetings were indispensable for preparing against Reine and it was impossible for this to not be picked up by <Beelzebub>.

Which one should be chosen—such a thing was decided without question.

If they couldn't seal Reine's reiryoku, then Kotori saw no chances for survival.

However, just because DEM had a lower priority than Reine, it didn't diminish their threat level at all.

The organization with quantity and military force that far surpassed <Ratatoskr> was now trying to strike at Shidou with all of their power.

“Anyway, retrieve Shidou right away! Temporarily reorganize altitude!”

“Roger that.....!”

In response to Kotori's instructions, the crew members responded back in unison.

“.....Shin?”

Having emerged from Kurumi and fused with her alter ego, Mio faintly raised her brow and let out a quiet voice after regaining her complete form.

Shidou, who was in front of her, let out a small groan as he fell to the ground on his knees and clutched his head in pain.

His appearance was just like a child afraid of thunder, but Mio knew best that Shidou wasn't the type of person to fall to his knees out of fear of herself or DEM.

Nor was he the type of person to feign illness in order to cause her to lower her guard.

But no, that was why she couldn't understand.

“What's wrong, Shin——”

As Mio was preparing to approach him, Shidou's body began to emit a faint light.

A mysterious phenomena. But as soon as she noticed it, it resembled <Fraxinus> attempting to transfer Shidou back to the ship. Perhaps, Kotori wanted to retrieve Shidou.

“.....”

It was possible for her to have interfered, but she chose to remain passive.

She had originally planned to move Shidou to a safe place. If it were Kotori and Maria, they ought to be able to discover and handle the symptoms currently plaguing Shidou.

Shidou's body was enveloped by light before disappearing instantaneously.

Mio let out a soft breath while watching Shidou leave.

“—It would be unromantic to ruin the scenery here with Wizards and mechanical dolls, how senseless.”

After speaking in a chilling tone, Mio once again turned her attention back to the sky.

“.....Wait for me, Shin. I'll finish this soon.”

Leaving just those brief words, Mio kicked against the sky. Her body left behind a gleaming trajectory of light as she flew towards the DEM fleet.



On the bridge of one of the DEM ships sailing the skies, Westcott was listening to various reports from the fleet through the loudspeaker.

Even though he was at the forefront, there weren't any emotions of tension or frustration marked on his expression. The corners of his mouth distorted into an elegant form as his fingertips would occasionally tap rhythmically to the surface of his black suit. It was almost like he was enjoying an afternoon holiday while relaxing to his favorite songs.

“—<Galdrabók>, battle preparations completed. On standby.”

“<Honorius>, same here.”

“<Almandar>, also ready here.”

After grasping each report, Westcott bombastically nodded.

“—Very good. Each ship, begin the operation.”

“Roger that!”

The captains of each respective ship responded back in unison. Their collective enthusiasm and excitement was transmitted through the loudspeaker as sonic wave that caused the surroundings to tremble.

“—Ike. Are you really okay?”

Nearby, Ellen glanced over at Westcott from the side.

Without the slightest degree of hesitation, Westcott let out an “ahh” sound in agreement.

“Of course, everything is on schedule.”

“.....”

In response to Westcott, Ellen remained silent for a moment before replying back with a brief sigh.

“Is that so? Well then.....that’s good.”

“Ah. There’s nothing to be worried about. The wish that we have been patiently waiting for will soon come to fruition.”

Westcott looked on to the main monitor while extending out his hands in a dramatic manner.

The main display reflected an image of Itsuka Shidou and <Deus> lying on the coast.

They were surrounded by the vast seas and forests, as well as some sparse accommodation facilities like hotels, shops, and private homes. There was nothing to isolate them from each other. Although it seemed that <Ratatoskr> had installed anti-aircraft weaponry in the buildings of Tenguu City, it was likely that they would never have the chance to install similar weapons on this coastline.

“—Oya?”

Westcott perked his brow upward. On the main screen, Shidou’s body began to emit a faint light before disappearing all together at the next moment.

It was probably <Fraxinus>’s transfer device. Likely owing to the emergence of <Deus> and DEM, they wanted to retrieve Shidou in order to regroup from this situation.

Despite this, it was still within the range of expectations. Westcott, using a calm tone—or rather to say in a delighted manner—called out his commands.

“The stage has finally been prepared. If you flee, I will be very troubled. —<Bandersnatch> team combat plan β. Prepare your actions accordingly.”

“—Yes.”

Responding to Westcott’s order, a quiet reply came from the speakers.



“Un.....gu, ah.....”

“—Shidou!”

As Shidou literally had his head squatted in an embrace with the ground, he suddenly a voice coming from above.

“Ugh.....?”

Enduring the pain, Shidou finally raised his head. As it turned out, the source of that voice had come from Tohka, who had an anxious look on her face.

No, it wasn't just Tohka. Origami, Kotori, Yoshino, Kaguya, Yuzuru, Miku, Natsumi, Nia, Mukuro—all the Spirits under <Ratatoskr>'s protection were here.

For a moment, Shidou thought that everyone had come to support him—but that wasn't right. Mio wasn't here and the surrounding scenery had transformed into the familiar <Fraxinus> bridge. It seemed that he had been retrieved through the transfer equipment.

Gradually, the intense headache began to disappear. While wiping away that sweat that had unconsciously appeared on his forehead, he quickly stood up while borrowing Tohka's hands as support.

“Tohka.....everyone.....”

“Umu, are you alright? Did Mio do something to you?”

“No, this is.....”

Just as Shidou was about to speak, the main monitor, which displayed the conditions outside, gave off a tremendous light.

“Ah——”

A huge sphere manifested in the sky, scatter around particles of light.

Shidou recognized that figure. ——<Ain Soph Aur>, the Angel of death that takes away the life of anything it comes in contact. Faced against that overwhelming destructive power, there was the silhouette of DEM ships collapsing apart one after the other.

It could no longer be described with words like war or battle. A unilateral massacre, a ruthless crusade, even comparing the difference in war potential to a child trampling an ant colony may not be enough.

“.....!”

“Hya—even after already hearing about this, Yoshinon is still surprised at this.”

“Consent. This is a bad game to fight against.”

“.....Yes. To tell the truth, we have to retreat while DEM is distracting Mio.

Everyone shared expressions of fright as they spoke to each other.

However, Shidou spoke out in a hoarse voice.

“No, that's.....”

“Mun.”

“What’s the matter, Nushi-sama?”

Listening to what Shidou was about to say, the Spirits all perked their eyes up in curiosity.

“.....No. I can’t escape.....I haven’t finished anything yet.”

That’s right. —He couldn’t run.

If Shidou’s guess was correct, then he couldn’t escape now.

However, those words were the most unexpected for the Spirits. Out of everyone’s confusion, Kotori’s voice rippled against his eardrums the loudest.

“What are you talking about Shidou!? Anyone who can see that battle can recognize that the strategy failed! I understand your feelings, but the situation won’t improve just by holding onto your intentions!”

“I’m not intending to let my emotions affect this decision. However—I can’t run.”

—Then.

Just as Shidou was speaking, the sound of a beeping alarm resounded on the bridge.

“What is that sound? Did someone forget to turn off their cell phone’s Robo-chan for serious scenes?”

“For a manga artist you have no sense for nicknames, Nia. —Now’s not the situation to act like a full-time drunkard. Kotori, someone is trying to communicate here. What should I do?”

Nia and Maria spat out sarcastic quips as if a natural greeting. Listening to that, Kotori slightly frowned.

“Communication?Alright, connect to the signal.”

“Roger that.”

As Maria spoke, static rustled on the main monitor before an imaged began to appear.

It looked like another person’s face being reflected—but that wasn’t quite right. If anything, it felt like a secret surveillance camera image or a secret filming shot. Several people were on display, but none of them seemed to be aware of the existence of the camera.

Moreover, it wasn’t just a single image. The screen was divided finely, with images displaying multiple different locations on the main monitor.

Seeing this, Kotori raised her brow in surprise.

“From this timing, I thought it was supposed to be communication from DEM. This is.....?”

“.....Mu!?”

Kotori turned around enquiringly, having heard Tohka raise her voice as if noticing something.

“Tohka, what happened?”

“Look at that screen, its Ai, Mai, and Mii!”

“.....Huh?”

Having heard what Tohka had said, Shidou looked up. Certainly, at the portion of the screen pointed by Tohka, the appearances of his classmates Yamabuki Ai, Hazakura Mai, and Fujibakama Mii appeared there. He didn't know if it was because of receiving supplementary lessons or part of a job involving committee members, but they were all still in school despite today being a day off. Looking more closely, he could also see Tonomachi and Tama-chan sensei behind them.

No, that wasn't all. Right after Tohka, this time Origami raised her eyebrows up.

“—Captain, Mikie, and Mily?”

On the image next to the Ai, Mai, Mii trio, the appearances of Origami's former coworkers and AST captain Kusakabe Ryouko were on display.

“Eh, Hiyori-san.....?”

“.....! Kanon-san—”

“Ha.....!? What is that guy doing.....?”

The Spirits all raised their voices one after the other. Among those on the screen, there was Miku's idol companion Asakura Hiyori, Yoshino and Natsumi's close friend Ayanokōji Kanon from their first experience with school, and also friends of Kaguya and Yuzuru that could all be confirmed.

That's right. There were all friends and acquaintances of the Spirits appearing on each of the divided screens.

“What is this.....”

Not understanding the intention of these images, Shidou curled his brow up in confusion.

However, in the next moment, there was a change in the image as Shidou quickly understood.

—The enemy's aim. This exceedingly unscrupulous strategy.

The windows of the classroom where the Ai, Mai, Mii trio were located splendidly shattered into pieces. Then, several <Bandersnatch> units appeared by the window, their inorganic electronic eyes squirming around.

“Kiyaaaaah!?”

“What, what is this!?”

“A terrorist suddenly appeared at school!?”

The screams of the Ai, Mai, Mii trio echoed onto the bridge through the speaker.

As if to match that shriek, the same things was happening on the other screens.

“Wha.....Is this DEM!? What do you mean!?”

“Ah, captain! The emergency equipment device——”

“Unfortunately, it’s in the vault.....!”

“Kya!? W-what is this...it startled me!?”

“Wait.....how did a robot suddenly fall down from the sky!?”

“Kanon-san wants to be noticed again.....wait you’re being seriously? Looks like Kanon-san will occasionally tell the truth.”

“It’s moving around strangely!? Run away!”

School. The Self Defense Force Garrison. A live concert venue. And a street marked by the red sunset.

The mechanical monster appeared throughout the city not warned by the spacequake alarm.

“Wha——”

This was an unusual scene. Just as the Spirits were confidential, the Realizer manifestation device controlling the <Bandersnatch> was not something made publically available.

To think of exposing them to the general public and using them to harm civilians, no sane person would ever implement that. Even for a colossal superpower like DEM, it would be impossible to achieve this perfect endgame.

No——perhaps they didn’t even consider about the necessities of the aftermath. From this possibility, Shidou felt an illusion of his heart being cornered.

“——Yah. Can you hear it, <Ratatoskr>?”

As Shidou felt a shudder, a voice other than screams reached the speaker.

Extremely calm, as if finding pleasure despite everything occurring—a male voice that if heard again would incense one’s nerves beyond relief. No mistake. DEM’s managing director, Isaac Westcott. Shidou shouted out his name.

“Westcott.....!”

“Ah. How are you enjoying it?”

“Don’t joke around! This has nothing to do with everyone! What is your goal.....!”

As Shidou spitefully called out to him, Westcott replied back in a nonchalant manner.

‘Goal, was it? Yes, I’m entirely indifferent to the means of collapse.’

“What did you say....?”

As Shidou was left baffled, Westcott continued on.

“Ideally, they would serve as hostages. Then take this as a declaration from myself, the most crafty and vicious kidnapper. If you want them to live, then hand over all of Itsuka Shidou’s Sephira Crystals.”

“Ku.....!”

Hearing Westcott’s declaration, Shidou clenched his teeth and frowned.

But then, Kotori placed her hand on his shoulder as if telling him to calm down.

“—Sorry, but aren’t you underestimating us too much? We still have measures considering these losses. If the Sephira Crystals are handed over to you, then the entire world will be rewritten. Of course, we are supposed to protect them. —But we are not that foolish to let our emotions affected these kinds of decisions.”

Kotori spoke in a low voice. But there was unmistakable sweat dripping down the wrinkles on her forehead. Perhaps, it was lucky that this was only a voice call.

Of course, it was easy to understand that Kotori wasn’t uttering those words calmly. At a better timing, she would have liked to insult Westcott for being a despicable coward.

But doing that would just mean deliberately revealing their weakness to the enemy. Therefore, Kotori must play the role of a composed and cruel commander. —To show that such a threat was meaningless.

Westcott let out a “hmm” sound as he continued on from Kotori’s declaration without a hint of surprise.

“Well, then it can’t be helped. I can only kill them as cruelly as possible like a compassionate dictator. Looking at a scene where their friends are brutally slaughtered, if at least one Spirit inverses, I can still reap the rewards.”

“.....!”

Shidou felt his breathing begin to clog. A cold sensation spread in his stomach.

He had used the Sixth Bullet <Vav> in order to travel back in time to change the future and prevent the Spirits’ deaths. But now, it was precisely because of his actions that his friends who wouldn’t have been in trouble currently faced the threat of death.

Although Kotori's response was similar to Shidou, his younger sister was a proud commander in every aspect. She wouldn't let fear take over her voice as she responded back calmly.

".....Ah, that really is scary. Well then I'll have to block the video now. Since these warm hearted enemies have bothered to make a long winded declaration."

"Oh, was that a blunder? Then it can't be helped. Even if the Spirits don't inverse—it's still enough for me to have some fun."

"You bastard.....!"

Hearing Westcott say this without deviating from the beaten track, the grievances buried within Shidou's stomach raised up to a scream.

He remembered what it was like confronting Westcott directly. That pair of rusted inorganic-like eyes that didn't see humans as people.

—He would do it. A feeling of confirmation similar to a curse. His words clearly did not arise from threats or bargaining alone.

"—Well then, let's answer that question. First, let's stain those images with blood. After that, I listen to your thoughts again."

"! Stop—"

As Shidou yelled in vain, Westcott snapped to command the <Bandersnatch> to proceed.



In works like manga, there is often an unexpected scene where characters pinch their cheeks in doubt that everything was all just a dream. According to one theory, it was said that in a dream.....one should feel no pain.

Each time when looking at this scene, the Ai, Mai, Mii trio would laugh, asking "Who would pull a prank like this?" They must have thought it was the perfect manga-like scenario. Certainly, the act must only serve properly test a character's dumbfounded response.

However, it would seem necessary to correct this view in the future.

After all, the mysterious robot ground had suddenly broken in through a window and it was already time to pinch their cheeks to find out if it was a dream.

"H-hey.....what is this.....?"

Ai dazedly asked while pinching her cheeks with her right hand in a comical manner.

Incidentally, despite the force pinched between her fingertips, there wasn't much pain felt. No, it was obvious that this wasn't a dream. But perhaps her sense of pain was dulled due to her brain secreting dopamine, endorphin, and beta carotene in response to this unexpected situation.

The number of robots was five. No, that number only counted those within the classroom, with many more floating outside. Each had a body that was slightly larger than a human being and all were equipped with thick arms and sharp claws. No matter how one looked, they seemed to be the type efficient at fighting, suppressing, and killing.

There were only five people in the classroom right now. Ai, her close friends Hazakura Mai, Fujibakama Mii, their homeroom teacher Okamine Tamae, and their classmate Tonomachi Hiroto. At the very least, against this mysterious battle robot (?), there was no one here capable of fighting it.

"Y-Yamabuki-san, Hazakura-san, Fujibakama-san! And also Tonomachi-san! It's dangerous here! Please hurry and run away!"

Their teacher Okamine, also known as Tama-chan sensei said as her slender body trembled.

However, the robots deployed to enclose Ai and the others, with the front line positioned at the entrance to the corridor. Each one had a look of immediately attacking if anyone tried to escape.

"W-what is going on with these robots!? In terms of design, shouldn't this be for a hero of justice!? Which way is to the evil army corps!?"

"In a future where there is war between machines and humanity, these robots have come to kill off humanity's future leader!? Seriously, to think I would become such a great person!?"

"Yaaaaah! Help! One time, just before I die, I want to try to bury my head in a girl's thighs!"

"Mai, Mii, and Tonomachi screamed while clinging onto Ai's right arm, left arms, and thighs respectively. For now, Ai kicked Tonomachi away.

Then, at that moment, the robot looking in front of them began to move as if it had received its instructions. At a brisk pace, they began walking to Ai and the others.

"Wha.....!"

"What.....!"

"Gu.....!"

A hoarse voice was wringed out from each of the Ai Mai Mii trio's throats.

But that was all that they could do. Because of fear, their bodies didn't move. Even if they moved, they still didn't know how to escape.

While doing so, the robot began to draw closer, its mechanical camera eye twitching as it locked onto Ai and the others, receding back its claws to reveal a large scale knife.

"Ah——"

A stunned cry leaked out from her throat. Her thought process compressed, extending out the time of the moment. A strange feeling, truly just like a revolving lantern: the memory of her life so far flashed before her very eyes.

(—Oh, I am really going to die. Despite living an ordinary life until now, I’m going to be killed by the sudden appearance of a robot. A robot? No, why is it a robot? Despite people saying that no one knows what one would encounter in life, this is too outrageous. Wow, seriously? Seriously? Ah, if I had known about this earlier, I would have decided to confess to Kishiwada-kun—)

The sharp claws swung down, tearing apart Ai’s thoughts which were concentrated to the utmost limit.

The Ground Self Defense Force Garrison. It was one of the key Japanese defensive points where personnel live and work.

Of course, various troops were stationed here in preparation for emergencies, among which for spacequakes—the secret force AST specializing in Spirit disasters.

This unit, which comprised of special Wizards capable of using the Realizer Manifestation Device, was the strongest among the domestic public armed forces. Instead of attacking here, it is better to attack the Metropolitan Police Department or the capitol, both of which would have a lower difficulty level.

But—right now. Something impossible was occurring right in front of the eyes of the aforementioned AST captain Kusakabe Ryouko.

“Wha.....”

A number of humanoid machines suddenly appeared in the lounge space in one corner of the building, where she was talking to AST member Mikie Okamine and mechanic Mildred F · Fujimura.

Ryouko recognized those models. DEM’s unmanned weapon, <Bandersnatch>.

However, even after noticing this, Ryouko couldn’t understand what was happening to them now.

Although she couldn’t say that there was absolutely no conflict, DEM still provided technology to AST, so they were from a so-called standpoint of a supporter. Under normal consideration, those weapons were unlikely to target Ryouko and the others.

However, it was clear now that the <Bandersnatch> had assumed a battle formation towards them, locking on with their electronic eye and swinging down vigorously with their claws.

“Tch—”

Ryouko scowled as she avoided the attack. Then, she pulled the 9 mm caliber pistol carried on her person and pulled the trigger.

However, such tactics were useless against the <Bandersnatch> that were protected by the Voluntary Territory. The bullet which Ryouko released stopped in the air before reaching the <Bandersnatch> and fell to the floor. Then, step by step, the mechanical dolls gradually shortened the distance to enclose them.

“C-captain.....is this related to what Origami-san said?”

Right beside her, Mikie recalled what she remembered.

That’s right. Yesterday, their former colleague Origami visited the base and issued a mysterious warning to them. Ryouko, Mikie, and Milly all discussed together what she had said.

DEM was an organization attempting to seize the power of the Spirits. Origami had said that on February 20th DEM may issue a request for war but they should reject it.

If that was the case, it certainly was not irrelevant to the current situation. No, it would be better to say that their lives might become targeted due to hearing what Origami had said.

While it was impossible to judge if that was true, now was not the time to think about this.

“Ku.....!”

Ryouko gritted her teeth as she watched glistening magical power begin to concentrate in the open palms of the <Bandersnatch>.

“Eh.....eh....?”

In a complete state of dismay and bewilderment, Asakura Hiyori frantically looked around.

But that was to have been expected. After all, while singing a live concert, strange mechanical dolls she had never seen before appeared on stage rather than the backup dancers.

“Heeeeeeeeeeeey! Hiyori-saaaaaaaaaaaaan!”

“Eh, what is this? An attack? Aren’t you worried?”

“Stupid, isn’t it part of the show?”

“But the music stopped playing?”

“Heeeeeeeeeeeey!”

About half of the audience was confused by the sudden situation, while the other half of the spectators thought it was part of the show and cheered even louder. But at the very least, Hiyori herself never heard of this as part of the script.

Hiyori began to have doubts about these robots. The director once said, “In a live concert, if all of the backup dancers were robots, what should Asakura Hiyori do?”

However, if thought about more calmly, there were too many factors inhibiting movements for an entire person with this plan. Moreover the movements of these mechanical robots were as smooth as CG, the infeasibility made Hiyori’s mind even more confused. —They were obviously not people, but could modern robots have such fluent motion control?

As Hiyori was thinking of such things, the claws on both hands of the mechanical robots began to flicker as they crept up to surround her.

“Kya……!”

Confronted by that creepy look, Hiyori couldn’t help but feel her voice choke up. However, from behind her, there were even more robots approaching.

“M-Miku-san……!”

Hiyori closed her eyes as she called out for Izayoi Miku, the name of a fellow idol and sempai she longed for.

Needless to say, it was impossible to call for help. With their metallic sight focused on Hiyori, they pointed the front end of their claws as if to skewer her from all sides.

However—at the very next moment.

“Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh—!”

As that fighting scream resounded in the classroom, the robot in front of Ai was beautifully cleaved in half.

“Huh……?”

From the sudden event transpiring, Ai could help but stare in befuddlement.

Then, a single girl appeared from the shadow of the screeching robot split in half.

“Huh——”

After recognizing that posture, Ai was left stunned once more.

But that was to be expected. Because the one standing there was——

“—You’re safe now, Ai, Mai, Mii. And also Tonomachi and Tama-chan sensei!”

Since it was Yatogami Tohka, their classmate wearing a lightly shining garment and holding a huge sword in hand.

“Fu—”

A soft exhale was heard in their ears, and then as if to echo that, a ray of light flashed past the arm of the <Bandersnatch>, blasting it away from Ryouko and the others.

“Wha……!?”

Ryouko instinctively held her breath in. Then, as if noticing something, Mikie raised her voice.

“O-Origami-san!?”

As if lead by that voice, Ryouko followed the direction Mikie’s eyes look on to.

Then, just as Mikie had said, Origami was there wearing a pure white dress over a silver colored CR-Unit.

“—Yes, did you call for me Hiyori-san?”

“Eh……?”

Hearing that voice resound overhead, Hiyori opened her eyes.

The robots that were surrounding her were now lying with their backs on the ground.

Hiyori raised her face to search for the direction of that voice, over there—

“M-Miku-san……!”

Miku, while wearing a phantasmal dress radiating faint light, was floating in the air.



“Alright—!”

While on <Fraxinus>’s bridge watching Tohka’s battle, Shidou clenched his fist.

That's right. On one of the split screens showcasing his classmates, Tohka had appeared with her limited Astral Dress and sword in hand to slash away the <Bandersnatch> trying to attack Ai, Mai, and Mii.

No, it wasn't just Tohka. Origami, Miku, Yoshino, Natsumi, Kaguya, and Yuzuru, all of who were just on the <Fraxinus> bridge, had all just arrived at their friends' locations, saving them just like Tohka.

The light from the reiryoku glistened on each of the split screens, reducing the <Bandersnatch> into scrap metal. While the <Bandersnatch> were a threat to humans, they were merely empty shells in front of the Spirits.

Of course, the location <Fraxinus> was floating above was not Tenguu City, but still overhead the sea of memories between Shinji and Mio. Even for Spirits, it should be impossible to rush towards where their friends were in time.

In order to make it possible——

“Mun. Long-distance travel was worrisome.....but somehow it worked fine.”

The ability held by Mukuro's <Michael>.

The key Angel <Michael>, capable of closing——or opening anything.

It's authority extended beyond tightly closing doors or locks. Intangible things like the human mind or memories——or even connecting two points in space through a “hole”. There was nothing that could not be opened by <Michael>.



That's right. After learning that their friends were in a crisis, the Spirits were able to instantaneous move to their respective locations through "holes" in space that Mukuro had opened.

Despite having said that, Shidou wasn't sure if this method was for the best.

Indeed, it had to have been done because there was no other way to save Ai, Mai, Mii, Tonomachi, and the others, but this method also carried a fatal risk.

The reason was simple. Hunting and killing the <Bandersnatch> in open public view was equivalent to——

"T-tohka-chan.....is that you?"

"Origami!? You, that form——"

"Miku-san, why are you here? Isn't that.....a stage costume?"

"Kiyaaaaaaaaa! Miku-saaaaaaaaan!"

"Ha.....ha!? Yoshino-san and Natsumi-san?"

"My sworn friend Kaguya! No way, did you at last awaken the aura of darkaness?"

"Yuzuru-san, what's up with those erotic clothes?"

From each screen, there were loud sounds of excitement eliciting both confusion and bafflement coming from each of the Spirit's friends.

The Spirits had to expose their identities as the price for saving their friends.

".....Ah, really. Even for <Ratatoskr>, I don't know if we can completely cover this up. This will definitely be a stomachache in the future."

While watching the restless people on the screen, Kotori despondingly placed her hand against her forehead.

However, Kotori muttered out a brief "but" as she sharpened her line of sight.

"——We've overcome it, Isaac Westcott."

"Fumu."

Westcott continued to speak after letting out a small groan.

"That technique is really clever. It is truly worthy of appreciation. But didn't I just say it? I don't care how they fall. ——It's always best to prepare a trump card."

".....What did you say?"

Hearing what Westcott had said, Kotori casted a suspicious gaze.

—The next moment. As if echoing after her voice, a terrible explosion detonated that violently swayed <Fraxinus>'s hull in the process.

“.....!? Kotori!”

“Ku.....! An attack from a DEM ship!? Maria, what is the situation!?”

“Yes. This is—”

As Kotori was inquiring about the current circumstances in an annoyed manner, Maria let out a confused voice.

“The DEM warship that has assaulted <Fraxinus>, it's positioned to assimilate the random voluntary territory.”

“Voluntary territory.....assimilation!? Is that even possible!?”

“Theoretically it is possible. If there is enough analytic power to fully comprehend the composition of the opponents territory and the voluntary territory itself is developed through a super high output.”

“.....”

Kotori held her breath in after listening to what Maria had said.

Then, as if to match that timing, the automatic camera sent an image to the main display. A beautiful airship boasting a streamlined hull had attached itself right beside <Fraxinus>.

“<Goetia>.....!”

Kotori called out that name in irritation.

The name was no stranger. <Goetia>, the personal ship of Ellen Mathers which destroyed <Fraxinus> before it's upgrade.

After being reborn as <Fraxinus EX Celsior>, they had returned the humiliation by borrowing the power of the Spirits—but now the majority of the Spirits were scattered throughout Tenguu city.

“Ku, Maria, shake it off—”

Just as Kotori was about to give instructions to Maria, <Goetia>'s hatch opened up, as “something” flew out at a tremendous speed towards <Fraxinus>.

At the next moment, the ceiling of the bridge was torn apart by a tremendous explosion. The high-output laser sword released dazzling magic in a blade shape arc, as the sunset peeked into the bridge. If the airship is not covered by voluntary territory, the crew, including Shidou, would have been sucked out because of the air pressure difference.

“Wha—”

“You’ve got to be kidding……!?”

A momentary chaos fell onto the bridge.

But that moment was more than enough for a Wizard.

“It’s an illusion that the inside of the ship would be safe. —At least in front of me.”

—Ellen Mathers.

Just as they recognized the identity of the intruder who destroyed the exterior of the ship and entered the bridge, her sword was already quickly approaching Shidou. Perhaps in less than a second—

However—

“—It’s always best to keep a trump card. Although I’m loathed to say the same words as that brutish director.”

A voice from an unknown source echoed. The next moment, as the magical blade drew towards him, Shidou’s body was raised above the ground.

“Ha—”

After a beat, Shidou quickly understood.

The identity of the person who saved him.

“—Mana!”

“Yes. —The trump card has arrived.”

That’s right. It was Shidou’s—no, Takamiya Shinji’s younger sister, Takamiya Mana. She was clad in the CR-Unit <Vinargandr> which gave the impression of a wolf. Apparently, she was stationed on the ship in case of an emergency.

“Ha—!”

With a crackling scream, Mana condensed her Voluntary Territory as the thrusters on the back of her CR-Unit propelled her forward to Ellen. The ship was enveloped by a dazzling light as Mana and Ellen flew out of the ship through the crack on the ceiling.

“Mana……!”

Even for Mana, it would be impossible to defeat Ellen alone. While clenching his fist, Shidou channeled reiryoku through his entire body, exerting all of his strength to curl his legs up from that stop.

“Shidou! Enough, stop—”

Even though Shidou could sense Kotori's intentions for him to desist, he couldn't stop to finish listening as he kicked against the floor of the bridge with all of his strength.

Then, just like that, he let the power of the Angel of Wind <Raphael> covered his entire body as he leaped out of the warship through the crack opened onto the ceiling.

Up 15,000 meters, it was a dizzying altitude. However, thanks to the Voluntary Territory covering the hull, there was no need to worry about the surrounding temperature, the thinness of the air, and natural factors such as wind. He set his feet on <Fraxinus> sleek purple and white exterior as he began to look for Mana and Ellen.

“—!”

Since this was an empty space without any obstructions to his sight, he quickly located them.

But the problem was—it wasn't just Ellen and Mana there.

“Yahahaha!”

“Ahaha, both the older brother and younger sister are here.”

“Can I also mix in?”

Several girls floating outside of <Fraxinus> smiled while echoing with a voice lacking the slightest degree of tension.

“<Nibelcol>!”

After recognizing them, Shidou couldn't help but call out their name.

Yes—<Nibelcol>. The pseudo-Spirits made through a combination of the Demon King <Beelzebub> and DEM's technology.

As the waves of laughter broke down, two more people came forward.

One of them was Artemisia Ashcroft, a Wizard of DEM just like Ellen.

The other person was—the head of DEM and the holder of the jet-black book, Isaac Westcott himself.

“Westcott.....!”

Shidou shouted as his expression began to shudder.

After all, the three of them contained the highest combat power within DEM. Honestly, Shidou didn't expect all of three of them to leave headquarters to appear at such a place.

In the distant sky, Mio continued to tear apart the DEM fleet. After seeing that scene from the edge of his field of vision, Shidou understood. Perhaps, they had already foreseen Mio's appearance and had used that large fleet as a decoy.

That's right. —Precisely for the sake of stealing the reiryoku sleeping within Shidou's body before claiming Mio's power for their own.

“Yah, Itsuka Shidou. No, is it better to call you Takamiya Shinji? And Mana as well. —Fu, isn't it truly a strange combination? It feels as if we've returned back to 30 years ago.”

Westcott spoke in a welcoming tone. But behind his eyes, Shidou could see an icy metallic light.

“.....Ah, it's true. You and Ellen haven't changed at all. After 30 years, I expected at least some aging.”

Even after Shidou spoke in a mocking manner, Westcott still kept the thin smile on his face. Almost as if he was wearing a mask. Meanwhile, Ellen made a slightly grumpy expression that made her more human-like in comparison.

“Well then, although this is a scenic spot to let old stories bloom—unfortunately there is no more time here. Even if it's a bit poor taste as a greeting after seeing you siblings getting along, I'll have to settle this before the Spirits return.”

In accordance to Westcott's command, Ellen, Artemisia, and the <Nibelcol> all spread out to enclose Shidou and Mana.

“Ku——”

“Tch.....”

Completely outnumbered. Shidou and Mana assumed battle stances while leaning on each other's backs.

Mana was undoubtedly one of the strongest Wizards in the world and Shidou had a number of Sephira Crystals at his disposal.

But, even after taking that into account, the situation was still dire.

Ellen Mathers, known as the strongest Wizard among humanity, and Artemisia Ashcroft whose powers were only second to her. As well as the Demon King <Beelzebub> under Westcott's control and his dependents, the pseudo- Spirit <Nibelcol>.

With opponents like them, their manpower was obviously insufficient. To go on like this—

However.

“—Ara, if you're talking about “siblings getting along” aren't you forgetting about one person?”

At that moment, just after hearing that voice come from down below, a petite figure flew out from the gap in the ship's outer armor.

“.....Kotori!?”

After confirming that appearance from the edge of his sight, Shidou couldn't help but raise his voice.

That's right. It was the captain of <Fraxinus> and Shidou's younger sister, Itsuka Kotori.

Moreover, her clothes were different than before. A combination between a military uniform and a kimono, a red Astral Dress weaved in flames. And in her hands, there was a large battle axe about twice her height.

"You, that appearance.....!"

"What are you surprised about? Mukuro has to maintain the "hole" so that everyone can come back and Nia has no fighting power. So, isn't there just me left?"

"Even if it's like that.....!"

As Shidou was about to continue, Kotori casted a sharp gaze before whispering.

"It's fine. Just for a little while, I can still exert my full strength without being hit by the destructive impulses. —Besides, it would be a poor joke not to do anything in this emergency."

"Kotori....."

"Kotori-san——"

Listening to what Kotori had said, Shidou and Mana immediately glanced at each other before nodding back.

In their hands they manifested Angel of the sword <Sandalphon> and the set up laser blade <Wolftail> respectively.

"—Let's go, Isaac Westcott. You may have wanted to seize the opportunity here, but let me tell you that this was the worst possible choice."

"Exactly. I'll show you the power of siblings. —Isn't that right, Kotori-san?"

".....! Un!"

While listening back to Shidou and Mana, Kotori's eyebrows twitched as she tightened the grip on her Angel <Camael>.

Shidou, Mana, and Kotori.

Right now, these three siblings were standing shoulder to shoulder on the battlefield for the first time.

While watching this, Westcott smiled as if finding it amusing.

"—Interesting. Then please resist humans."

At that moment.

“—!”

As if bouncing off that voice, Ellen, Artemisia, and the countless <Nibelcol> all attacked at once.



Floating above <Fraxinus> was its sister warship, <Ulmus>.

On the bridge now, there were alarms indicating an emergency situation, explosions overheard by the speakers, and crew members loudly shouting their reports.

But that had been expected. In the airspace in front of them, the Spirit of Origin was fighting the DEM fleet, while a team led by Westcott was taking advantage of that to attack <Fraxinus>.

Additionally, most of the Spirits, who were the main fighting force of <Fraxinus>, were now scattered throughout the region. Several explosions detonated nearby the coast that was just peaceful ten minutes ago.

“.....”

The chairman of <Ratatoskr>’s round table, Elliot Woodman, stroked his beard while his expression was marked by a stern look.

The situation was very grim. While Shidou, Kotori, and Mana were putting up a good fight outside of <Fraxinus>, they were pressured by Ellen’s power and overwhelmed by the difference in numbers. Moreover, <Deus> was likely to arrive there at any time.

“.....<Deus>. —Mio?”

With his blurred vision, Woodman looked on to radiance displayed by the Spirit on the main monitor.

Even though his eyesight had declined—no, as a pure Magician, Woodman didn’t even have to look to sense that massive reiryoku.

—There was no doubt. It was the Spirit from that time.

Thirty years ago, in order to wage revenge against humanity, Woodman, Westcott, Ellen, and Karen had summoned her—the existence that had captured his heart. She was the indirect cause for the birth of <Ratatoskr> and the starting point for every event afterwards.

He was surprised when hearing the report from <Fraxinus> that Murasame Reine was Mio’s provisional disguise and Itsuka Shidou was her attempts at reconstructing Takamiya Shinji. But Woodman also felt a strange feeling of realization.

Falling in love with the Spirit, inaugurating an institution to protect Spirits, the discovery of a boy who could seal reiryoku—all of it felt like a miracle. But perhaps Mio had already factored in Woodman's existence and behavior when drawing up her plans.

“.....Yare, yare, to think that I had fallen in love with such a devious woman.”

Woodman muttered self-deprecatingly before thinking again.

According to Kotori's report, the Spirit of Origin—Mio was, in order to change Itsuka Shidou back to Takamiya Shinji, willing to kill all the Spirits to recover the Sephira Crystals.

—The Spirit he had fallen in love with and the Spirits they had been protecting. If the two sides became hostile, which side should he take—

“.....Haha.”

While thinking of this, Woodman laughed again.

—The answer was self-evident. Both.

Elliot Woodman had parted ways with his former colleagues and chose the path to protect the Spirits by establishing the organization called <Ratatoskr>.

Such an innocent man couldn't make a straightforward choice between those two alternatives.

And if it were Itsuka Shidou—he was convinced that gentle boy would agree with this answer.

“—So, for him as well, we must first protect the Spirits.”

Woodman quietly spoke to the woman waiting behind him.

“Karen. —Make preparations for <Wodan>.”

<Wodan>. The name of the CR-Unit that can be said to be the crystallization of <Ratatoskr>'s technology.

The golden armor bearing the name of the King of Gods. Even for Woodman, a pure Magician and an artificial Wizard, it was an ultra-high powerful unit that allowed him to use the Realizer Manifestation Device to return his body back to his prime.

However, using it was also equivalent to burning out the rest of Woodman's lifespan.

“.....So you're going, Elliot.”

The woman wearing glasses—Karen Mathers spoke in a calm but also lonely tone. Woodman thinly sighed while muttering out an apology.

“Ike, and also Ellen and Artemisia. I am the only one in <Ratatoskr> that can overcome that battle situation. Then.....I have no choice but to go. Don't you think that a man who betrayed his comrades to defend Spirits is liable to get murdered on his mission?”

As Woodman spoke, Karen let out a sigh after a moment of silence.

“It’s really troubling. Although my heart wants to stop you—but if you were the type of man who kept himself here, I would have never followed you in the first place.”

“—Fu.”

Hearing Karen’s words, Woodman loosened his cheeks as he said, “shall we go?”

Under the watchful eye of the crew, Karen untied the lock on Woodman’s wheelchair.

But—just at that moment.

“.....!? P-please wait, Sir. Woodman!? This.....response is.....”

One of the crew members on the lower half of the bridge raised a shrill voice as if noticing something.



“Fu—”

“Kahahahahahaha!”

“Dieeeeee!”

“Ku—”

The warship <Fraxinus> instantly transformed into a battlefield.

Ellen and Artemisia’s laser swords flashed with dense concentrated maryoku as the countless fluttering pages folded into various shapes.

While knocking them down with <Sandalphon>, the cold air from <Zafkiel> was distributed through a squall conjured by <Raphael>. Rays of light from <Metatron> were diffused into a “hole” opened in space by <Michael>, slaughtering away the <Nibelcol> one by one.

Both Mana and Kotori began mowing down the enemy by using the two major equipment of <Vinargandr>, <Wolftail> and <Wolffang>, and flames from <Camael> respectively.

Faced against DEM’s greatest war potential, Shidou and his siblings lead a fierce charge on the dense battlefield.

In this war of offense and defense, a single moment of negligence would spell death. While summoning multiple Angels, Shidou volleyed between attacking, supporting his allies, and sometimes whispering words of love to the <Nibelcol>.

However—this fight was only in equilibrium for a few minutes.

With the overwhelming amount of undead <Nibelcol>, Shidou was targeted by Ellen as the only one who could seal them, forcing him to focus only on defense. At the same time, Kotori and Mana were also gradually suppressed.

“Ku.....!”

“Kyahaha, keep persevering!”

“But it’s useless! Continuing on like this.....”

“This is the end!”

As Shidou resisted Ellen’s attack, the paper airplane-type projectile’s released from <Beelzebub ▪ Jeliddo> pierced through Shidou from each direction.

“Ku, ah.....!”

A sharp pain was felt as blood began to spill profusely. The flames of <Camael> began to heal the wound, but at the moment his concentration faltered from being held down by the <Nibelcol>, Ellen’s laser sword soon struck.

“Shidou!”

“Nii-sama!”

Kotori and Mana let out a cry of concern. But—they were blocked by the myriad of <Nibelcol> to the point where it was difficult to move.

At that time, Westcott bombastically raised his hand. In response, Ellen lifted her laser sword in a casual manner.

“—Well then, it’s over.”

“Ku.....in a place like this.....!”

Shidou groaned as he tried to inject enough strength to free his limbs from these restraints. However, the power of the <Nibelcol> was too strong, rendering him immobile.

“Finally.....finally.....after finally realizing Mio’s real wish.....!”

Then—

Just as Shidou tried to scream—

“—Well, this time let me pay the debt owed to you, Shidou-san.”

A familiar voice resounded from somewhere.

The next moment, a black shadow spread out from the exterior of <Fraxinus> where Shidou and the others were located, and then countless figures flew out from the shadow.

A black and red Astral Dress. Hair unevenly tied on both sides. And also—a clock-marked pupil in her left eye socket.

That's right. Several "Tokisaki Kurumi" appeared on the scene, grabbing against, the <Nibelcol>, Ellen, and Artemisia while firing bullets of condensed shadows.

"Wha—?"

"Huh.....?"

"Haaaah!?"

The situation was completely outside of their expectations. Ellen, Artemisia, and the <Nibelcol> all fell into a panic.

Needless to say, despite their stunned expressions, they were still sidestepping Kurumi's attacks and decapitating everything above the opposing Kurumi clones' shoulders in retaliation. But due to the surprise attack, their attention was momentarily drawn away.

So—that was why they didn't notice.

Behind the <Nibelcol>, the commander was issuing out his directions.

But behind even that, a black shadow was hanging.

"——You finally let your guard down, Isaac Westcott."

Westcott slightly frowned, turning to his back.

But at that moment——Kurumi's arm had already pierced through his chest.

"——"

"Ike!"

Ellen screamed, causing the surrounding air to vibrate.

With the blood flowing from Westcott's chest, a little crystal-like object appeared.

——Sephira Crystal. The object Westcott had stolen from Nia and the source of the Spirit's power.

"Ufufu——Surely, I'll be taking this."

Kurumi said as she smirked, seizing the Sephira Crystal that was floating in the air before jumping backwards.

At that moment——

“Gah.....!?”

“Ah, ah, ahhhhh.....!”

The nearby <Nibelcol> suddenly collapsed down in pain one after the other, reverting back to sheets of paper that melted into thin air.

The <Nibelcol> were originally a miracle born from the power of <Beelzebub>. Since the Sephira Crystal, the source of their power, had been separated from its host, they would no longer be able to maintain their own existence.

As if conforming to this lead, several of the surrounding Kurumi clones pointed their muzzles at Westcott.

“Kihi.”

“Kihihhi.”

“Kihihihihihhi.”

With a violent laugh, the clones all pulled the trigger at the same time. A hail of bullets converged towards Westcott.

“——Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Ellen screamed, blowing away the surrounding Kurumi clones as she rushed to Westcott.

In perhaps less than a second after that scream, she arrived towards Westcott and covered him with her Voluntary Territory.

Even so, several bullets had already landed on Westcott faster than Ellen’s arrival. Blood splattered from his right shoulder, left foot, and abdomen.

“Ku.....! Ike! Stay with us!”

Ellen used the voluntary territory to support Westcott’s body and stop the bleeding. Then, her eyes swept around to check the surrounding situation.

“——Artemisia! Withdraw!”

Thinking for just a moment, the judgment was made in an instant. Ellen raised a scream. Even for the world’s strongest Wizard, it would be a bad call to continue fighting while having to defend the wounded Westcott after losing <Beelzebub> and the <Nibelcol>.

“——Un, understood!”

Artemisia nodded, kicking off the ground after cutting down a Kurumi clone.

Ellen and Artemisia, while carrying Westcott in their Voluntary Territory, escaped from the battle scene and disappeared into the sky at an alarming speed.

Although the Kurumi clones fired a few bullets in pursuit, none of them choose to chase after them.

Kurumi likely also understood. It was unlikely to catch up to Ellen—and even if she did it would only mean incurring more injuries on her side.

“Kurumi.....?”

Afterwards, Shidou slowly called out the name of that girl.

There was no doubt. Over there was the Spirit that was supposed to have been killed by Mio, Tokisaki Kurumi.

Moreover, it was different from that time where a single Kurumi clone had escaped into the future. It was unmistakably the “real Kurumi” with the abilities of an Angel and her countless clones.

“Ara, ara, how do you do Shidou-san. Kotori-san and Mana-san. What’s wrong? Why are you looking at me so strangely?”

Kurumi spoke with a slight chuckle. Imitated by her clones, the surroundings were enshrouded by laughter just like a fog.

“What’s wrong.....you should have just died a while ago.....”

“Ara, ara. Was it not Shidou-san who told me about Mio-san. This is me after all. Did you think that I would stand in front of Mio-san without any countermeasures?”

Kurumi joked about, as she pretended to press her pistol against her own forehead.

“—The moment that Mio-san tried to take my Sephira Crystal and escape to the outside world, I transferred by memories and Sephira Crystal to a clone generated by the Eighth Bullet <Het>. —Needless to say, prior preparation is necessary.”

“Wha—”

Hearing what Kurumi had said, Shidou’s eyes lit up. Certainly, when Shidou provided that information, he wondered if there was a possibility for Kurumi to survive—but he never expected this to be possible.

“What you’re saying is that.....you’re now in the situation where the personality of the real Kurumi is in the body of a clone.....?”

Listening to Shidou, Kurumi soon expressed a meaningful smile.

“Well, I’ll tell you the details later if we have the chance—besides that, right now.”

Kurumi narrowed her eyes as she looked down to the Sephira Crystal she had taken from Westcott. Then, she pointed her pistol towards it.

“<Zafkiel>—The Fourth Bullet <Dalet>.”

While saying that, she fired the Fourth Bullet <Dalet>.

Then, the Sephira Crystal marked by the color of darkness began to give a faint pale radiance once more.

That’s right. —Just like that, the inverted Sephira Crystal had returned back to its original state.

“At last, I finally got it.”

Kurumi smiled as she pressed the Sephira Crystal against her own chest.

The Sephira Crystal released a strong light—as it was inhaled into Kurumi’s chest.

“Ah—ha…….”

Kurumi smiled in satisfaction, trembling from the pleasure.

“Ah, ah, it’s overflowing, it’s overflowing. This is—a second Sephira Crystal. Ufufu, it’s feels as if I can do anything now.”

“Kurumi……!?! You, what on earth are you——”

As Shidou cried out in astonishment, another voice was heard as if echoing after him.

“Shidou!”

“Shidou-san……!”

The next moment, several girls wearing Limited Astral Dresses appeared out from the fissure opened at the exterior of <Fraxinus>. Apparently, they had finished destroyed the <Bandersnatch> from the other side of the “hole” and had come back here.

“Sorry, Shidou! I am late——”

Tohka turned around with <Sandalphon> in her hands—her eyes widening in surprise after seeing Kurumi.

Although the other Spirits seemed to have received a minimal explanation from Nia and Maria, it was unexpected to see Kurumi there. They all displayed a similar reaction to that of Tohka.

“Kurumi……?”

“W-what’s going on? The news I heard was that the people from DEM were attacking Darling…….”

As Miku surveyed around restlessly, Kurumi once again let out an amused laugh.

“Ufufu, I’m sorry. I had gotten the role of helping Shidou-san. Well—”

Kurumi spoke while shrugging her shoulders self-depreciatingly.

“—Apparently, it seems that an even more troublesome person has come over.”

“Huh.....?”

Listening to Kurumi, Shidou slightly frowned.

But—after a brief moment, Shidou understood what Kurumi meant. No, he was forced to comprehend it midway through.

In the blink of an eye, the entire world changed.

“Wha—”

From the sea of clouds dyed in the sunset, the surrounding scenery was instantly repainted into a monochrome space composed of sharp straight lines.

It was almost like be thrown into a dream—no, rather it was being awakened from a beautiful dream and being tossed back into cold reality.

“.....! Shidou-san!”

“This is.....!”

The Spirits all let out trembling voices brimming with fear.

Shidou felt the same fear overtake his heart. Suddenly, he lost control of his breathing for a moment.

However, there was still a decisive difference between Shidou and the Spirits. Shidou had already experienced this phenomena once before.

“Mio.....!”

Shidou had wringed out that name from his throat.

That’s right. There was no doubt about it; this was the authority of Mio’s second Angel.

“—Un. Sorry, Shin.”

Such a voice echoed in the air as if responding to Shidou’s call. Opening his eyes and looking over there, Mio had appeared in the empty space that had nothing beforehand.

No, that wasn’t all. Above her head was a flower bud wrapping around a girl at the center and behind her was a large tree with a girl attached to the trunk, floating in the air as its branches and roots began expanding outward.

The Angel of Death that deprived life, <Ain Soph Aur>.

And the Angels of laws capable of rewriting reason itself, <Ain Soph>.

Both were Mio's strongest wings: apostles of ruin with power far exceeding the norm.

"I didn't expect to be caught in such a feint. But it's good everything worked out. Thank you for protecting Shin for me, Kurumi."

".....Ara, ara."

In Mio's words of gratitude there was no meaning felt—no, perhaps because it couldn't be felt—Kurumi distorted her face in displeasure.

"Shidou!"

In line with Tohka's voice, the Spirits lined up to protect Shidou. Everyone did not dare to let their glares move away from Mio while holding up their Angels.

"Mio's goal is Shidou. Run away as we buy some time."

"Listening to what you said, Mana shouldn't have been killed. Leave the charge to me."

Origami and Mana, both of whom stood in front of Shidou, spoke without averting their eyes away from Mio.

"....."

However, Shidou clenched his fist, placing his hands against their shoulders as he walked forward.

"Shidou!?"

"Stop. What are you doing, it's too dangerous."

The Spirits began to move to stop him. However, Shidou steadily progressed onward.

From his personal experience, it was impossible to escape when imprisoned in this space—but more than anything, in order to save Mio he couldn't escape.

Yes. Shidou had finally noticed.

He discovered the source of the headache that intermittently occurred after exchanging kiss with Reine.

He noticed what memory had been sporadically invoked at that time.

—And also the truth that it pointed towards.

".....Mio."

“—Shin.”

As Shidou called out her name, Mio seemed happy to respond back to him.

Mio’s movements and expression made Shidou feel his heart tightly contract.

However, Shidou pushed through the pain and marched forward.

“.....Finally, I understand. That memory was—Mio, was it yours?”

Shidou touched his forehead while staring into Mio’s eyes.

Indeed, the strategy for Reine had ended in failure. Although the pathway had been established, the reiryoku seal had not been realized. And through the pathway, Shidou’s memories of the future had been exposed. It was exactly the worst case scenario that could be conceptualized.

Yet, it also showed another incident.

Just as Shidou’s memories were shared to Reine through the pathway, Reine—Mio’s memories were also shown to Shidou.

The despair of losing Shinji, the sorrow, all of these negative emotions flowed in a single breath into Shidou, who suffered a painful headache.

However, in Mio’s despair there was only a single glimmer of hope.

And that was exactly—Shidou’s own existence.

However—

“.....I couldn’t seal your reiryoku. Surely, it was because of I was simply not strong enough. You’re the Spirit of Origin. On the other hand, I haven’t even finished collecting all of the Sephira Crystals.”

But Shidou continued on.

“That’s not all. The previous failure.....it wasn’t only because of that. The reason was very simple. I’ve heard it from Kotori countless times already. —In order to seal a Spirit’s reiryoku, I have to open the Spirit’s heart to me and then kiss her. But Mio still hasn’t opened her heart to me.....!”

“.....Shin?”

Mio let out a confused voice upon hearing Shidou’s remark. From behind, Kotori’s voice in suspicion was also heard.

“What’s going on? Surely, at that time, her relationship values reached the sealable range—”

“No. It’s different. Who Mio loves—isn’t Shidou but Shinji.”

Shidou held the tears back from spilling as he let out those words from his clogged throat.

“And Shinji is already.....no more.”

“——”

Mio fell speechless as she opened her eyes.

A chill reached Shidou’s spine. It was unknown whether this was due to the feeling from the words he himself issued or due to <Ain Soph> responding greatly to Mio’s heart, but the surrounding ambient temperature had significantly dropped.

From her slightly twitching lips, Mio poured out her words.

“What—are you talking about, Shin? I remade Shin and gave the power of the Spirits so you would absolutely never die again——”

“.....Ah, your power is really amazing. But suppose that I collect all of the Sephira Crystals and my memories as “Itsuka Shidou” are erased——”

Shidou stopped talking for a moment.

Since these words might crush Mio’s heart. The memories of Shinji that loved Mio and also Shidou’s own feelings of consideration for Reine, refused to let him speak.

But—he had to say this. Shidou spoke while clenching his fist so tightly to the point where his hand almost began to bleed.

“——Is that really Shinji?”

“——”

Then.

The destructive words and the possibility he arrived at upon seeing Mio’s memories.

Deep in Mio’s mind, she had tried to cover it up. Even though she might have considered it, she could help trying to ignore it.

Shidou intentionally excavated it back to the surface.

“A person that has both Shinji’s memories and form. But that is not really Shinji. Shinji’s soul doesn’t exist here.You must have already known. But even then while knowing, you had to rely on that! But—can that Shinji really fill your heart, Mio?”

“.....”

Hearing what Shidou had said, Mio fell silent for a while—but at last she sadly opened her mouth.

“.....Why would you say such a thing, Shin?”

Then, as if matching Mio’s state, the space surrounding Shidou and the others began to shake.

“I have only Shin. I have lived this far just to meet Shin once more.”

“—Don’t be afraid!”

Involuntarily, Shidou began to shout.

Startled by this, the Spirits around him began to tremble.

“Only Shin.....? Don’t be stupid! Me! The Spirits! Don’t you still have that! Is the time we spent together that much inferior to Shin.....!?”

“.....”

Against Shidou’s appeal, Mio, however, didn’t show a significant response. —As if saying that she had already come to the same answer long ago.

Instead, while weeping tears, Mio muttered out a small “is that so?”

“Because you are not Shin you can say this. I must quickly turn you back to Shin soon. —Thank you for everything so far, Shidou. But, farewell.”

—At that moment.

The air began to vibrate, ripples formed as the huge floating tree behind Mio extended out its “branches” and “roots” to both heaven and earth.

The squirming tentacle flew towards Shidou at a speed faster than the eye could follow.

“Wha—”

“Ku.....!”

“Dangerous.....!”

Tohka and Kaguya used <Sandalphon> and <Raphael> to slash apart and blow away the roots approaching Shidou.

“Sorry, and thanks for the save.”

“Don’t worry about it! But what are we going to do now!?”

Tohka screamed while lifting up <Sandalphon>. While looking towards Mio, Shidou made a small nod forward.

After all, it was impossible to escape. And—as the one who notice that, there was still something that needed to be done.

“Once again.....I will kiss Mio.”

“What.....?”

“Ha.....!? Weren’t you the one that said the relationship value was insufficient!”

As Shidou said that, Kotori screamed in a tone marked by complete incomprehension.

That was true. But—no, that was why Shidou had to go.

“So—this time not as Shinji. But let her choose me as Itsuka Shidou. If not, Mio will—”

Shidou words were cut off midway through. The “roots” from below and the “branches” from the sky extended out to capture Shidou’s body.

“Shidou!”

“Ku—”

No, it wasn’t just that this time. Bands of light from Mio’s Astral Dress stretched out towards the Spirits.

The memory from the future world came flooding back. This was different from the “branches” and “roots” used for the purpose of capturing Shidou. It was a single attack to pierce through the Spirits in order to retrieve their residual Sephira Crystals.

“Avoid it, everyone! You can’t take this attack!”

“—!”

In response to Shidou’s voice, the Spirits kicked against the exterior of the ship to repel the attack. But in the resulting momentary gap, countless “roots” swarmed to Shidou.

“Ku—!”

“Nushi-sama!”

“Darling!”

The screams from the Spirits shook his eardrums.

However, just as the “roots” were about to reach him, a force pulled on his body as he was overcome by a strange sense of floating.

After a moment, he soon understood the situation. —In his hands, he was assisted by Kurumi, who appeared above his head.

“Kurumi!”

“Ufufu, that was a dangerous spot.”

Kurumi pulled Shidou up in a princess carry while lightly avoiding the “roots” and “branches”.

“.....This position is a bit embarrassing.”

“Now’s not the time to say that. Anyway——”

With the countless Kurumi clones defending them, Kurumi turned her attention to Shidou.

“——I heard something very interesting. To kiss Mio-san once again.”

“.....Ah, I’m going for that.”

As Shidou replied back, Kurumi seemed surprised but also narrowed her eyes in interest.

“However, Shidou-san has already failed in the seal once. Is there any chance in wining?”

“.....That——”

After hesitating for a moment, Shidou told her the revelation he discovered upon seeing Mio’s memories.

——That other possibility.

“.....”

Hearing that for the first time, Kurumi rounded her eyes.

“.....Ara, ara.”

She narrowed her eyes as if both irritated and sad.

“.....So that is Mio-san’s real wish? I would laugh, to think that selfishness reached to that extent. Did we turn into Spirits for that goal?”

Kurumi huffed from her nose in disdain, but after a brief sigh, she turned to face Shidou again.

“——Shidou-san.”

“Wha——.....!?”

Shidou’s words were cut in half.

No, to be more precise, they were forcibly stopped.

——By Kurumi’s soft lips.

Yes. While still holding him in an embrace, Kurumi——had kissed Shidou.

“.....?”

Being too sudden, his head fell into confusion. But as the familiar warm feeling flowing from the lips entered his body, Shidou soon grasped the situation.

—Kurumi. The Worst Spirit had entrusted her reiryoku to Shidou.

“—Please don’t misunderstand, Shidou-san.”

As if reading his thoughts, Kurumi lifted up her face and turned to the side.

“Isn’t there no chance for escape after being captured in this space? And since Mio-san has information about the future, there’s a high possibility that even traveling back in time through <Zafkiel> will be stopped. —Then, wouldn’t it be smarter to bet on a possibility with a higher survival rate?”

Kurumi’s Astral Dress melted and faded away into the air.

But Kurumi continued on without feeling ashamed.

“I have done what I can. Please finish it properly.”

Kurumi turned to face Shidou, looking directly into his eyes. The clock-piece on her left eye had changed back to an ordinary pupil.

“—Ah. Thank you, Kurumi.”

Shidou nodded back, kissing Kurumi once again before leaping into the air.

“—Ara, ara.”

While looking at Shidou’s back, Kurumi stroked her lips with her fingers.

“You’ve really become very capable, Shidou-san.”

Kurumi chuckled before letting out a soft sigh.

“.....Anyway, it’s been taken away beautifully. But the remaining about of reiryoku should be enough for a dress.”

The words said earlier continued to ruminate in her mind. —The conditions for sealing a Spirit’s reiryoku. Open that Spirit’s heart and then a kiss.

Then, since Kurumi’s reiryoku had been beautifully sealed—

“—Truly, I am also a troubled person.”

Kurumi loosened her face, assuming her Limited Astral Dress just like the other Spirits as she reentered the battle.

“——”

—His body was brimming with strength.

Kurumi's Sephira Crystal and Nia's Sephira Crystal. Together with the Sephira Crystals of everyone else sealed so far, all ten powers had been absorbed into Shidou's body; a feeling close to omnipotence was felt.

His body felt light. There was no pain. His fatigue dispersed as vitality enriched his entire body up to his fingertips.

A supernatural reiryoku that was clearly different from the past.

In this manner—it will work.

“<Raphael>!”

Shidou clenched his fist; his entire body was coated by the wind as he dove into the sky.

The movements of the “roots” and “branches” that he could hardly avoid before now seemed so slow as if time had stopped. He easily avoided the approaching attacks as he moved closer to Mio.

No—it may have not been because Shidou had obtained all of the Sephira Crystals.

When dodging the “roots” and “branches” that grew like thorns, Shidou caught a strange sight at the edge of his vision.

The statues of the girls at the trunk of <Ain Soph> and the center of <Ain Soph Aur>.

There was a subtle difference that he wouldn't have noticed without his newfound super senses.

It looked as if the statue of those two girls were looking into his eyes, sadly smiling.

As if—requesting him to take care of Mio.

“—Leave it to me.”

As Shidou muttered to himself, he kicked off against sky, reaching Mio's location in the blink of an eye.

“—! Shin!”

Mio widened her eyes in surprise.

Without saying anything, Shidou embraced her—

“Un—”

“——”

Pressing his lips against her lips

Chapter 4: Momentary Paradise

“Ike—Ike! Hang in there Ike!”

Ellen, who left the battlefield carrying Westcott in a Voluntary Territory, constantly called out to him while applying hemostasis, pain relief, and accelerated healing.

Westcott’s wounds were definitely fatal injuries, but it was a different matter when the person carrying him was the World’s Strongest Wizard. Although it was not as powerful as the Medical Realizer Apparatus, Ellen’s delicately woven Territory can still block his wounds to an extent.

Even so, that was just the physical aspects. Even if the wound healed well, no one knew if he would wake up again after losing consciousness. In order to not let this happen, Ellen continued to call out for Westcott.

“.....Ah, I can hear you, Ellen.”

Westcott made a weak but sure response, his trembling fingers touching his chest now stained in blood.

“.....Fu, I see, so this is the feeling of a Sephira Crystal being extracted while still being alive. I’ve obtained valuable experience.”

“Now’s not the time to joke around.....!”

As Ellen roared in a voice that was about to cry, Westcott smiled as if appreciating it. Then, he turned his attention to Artemisia right next him.

“.....Well then, what’s the current situation?”

“—<Deus> has returned. Also, it seems that <Nightmare> has entrusted her power to Itsuka Shidou, who is now heading to <Deus>’s location.”

“.....And <Goetia>?”

Westcott continued to ask. This time it was Ellen who responded back.

“.....Right now, beside <Fraxinus>. Remote control has not been interrupted.”

“.....I see.”

Listening to Ellen’s words, Westcott nodded satisfactorily.

“—It’s going well, is it not?”

Then, Westcott smiled.

As if—it seemed that everything was going according to plan.



Above the sea of clouds, on the exterior of the aerial vessel <Fraxinus EX Celsior>, which was positioned in the skies like an enormous castle.

“Ku.....”

As the captain in command of the warship, Kotori let out a small anguished groan, powerlessly kneeling down on the spot.

Following this, the Angel in her hands <Camael> and the Limited Astral Dress covering her body dissolved away into the air. The brave Spirit of fire returned back into a delicate young girl wearing a military uniform.

“Kotori!”

“Are you alright, Kotori-san?”

The Spirits and Mana gathered around her with a worried look. Kotori tried to nod calmly in order to make everyone feel at ease.

“Yes, I’m fine. I’m not injured. —Just the time limit has been reached.”

Kotori placed her hand against her chest to adjust her breathing. The Spirits and Mana all breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing that.

The Angel of fire <Camael> possessed by Kotori had tremendous destructive power and an irreconcilable recovery capacity. However, the price for using that power to long will cause a strong destructive impulse to sprout. For that reason, Kotori tried not manifest her Astral Dress or Angel as much as possible, and even in inevitable cases she would set a voluntary time limit on the battle.

Despite having said that, in the heat of battle, she may not be able to lift her Limited Astral Dress even if the time limit had been reached. This meant right now was surely a blessing.

That’s right. Just a moment ago, Mio’s attack, which disseminated like a tyrannical storm, had now completely disappeared without a trace.

However——Kotori didn’t feel that this outcome was worthy of celebration yet.

At the moment when Shidou kissed Mio, the huge Angels floating behind Mio enveloped both of them and changed into a huge sphere.

“This is.....”

“Mysterious. What on earth is going on?”

Kaguya and Yuzuru let out a surprised voice as they quietly passed through the sphere.

Despite those words only being spoken by the Yamai Sisters, it wasn't an exaggeration to say that everyone here had a similar impression to the current situation.

The size was about 10 meters in diameter. The smooth spherical shape had a jewel-like exterior while reflecting various shades of light.

Its overall appearance resembled a giant cocoon—or a plant seed waiting to germinate.

“Kotori, what happened to Shidou? Is he safe?”

Tohka uneasily frowned as she inquired. After hesitating for a moment, Kotori vigorously nodded back.

“Well, of course. Has Shidou ever been the type of person to ever lightly solve a dispute?”

“Mu.....umu, that's right.”

Tohka nodded back to Kotori's reply.

Her appearance didn't match obediently believing in Kotori's words. But rather it was more appropriate to say that she was considering Kotori's position as commander while also trying to not make everyone else feel uneasy.

.....Was this the feeling of parent seeing growth in their child? Despite not consciously thinking about this matter right now, it was certainly a strange feeling.

Regardless, they didn't even have so much as a single clue in their current state. Kotori raised her voice towards the communication device attached to the back of her ear.

“——Bridge, can you hear me? Try to visualize the interior through the observation device.”

“Yes, yes, please wait a moment imoto-chan.”

Such a voice was heard responding back to Kotori's instructions.

However, Kotori knitted her brow at the response. Rather than coming from the bone conduction communication device, the sound felt directly transmitted to her ears.

The reason was quickly discovered——from the hole opened in the exterior of <Fraxinus>, Nia quickly emerged out while wearing the <Ratatoskr> military uniform.

“Hello——the ever accompanying Nia-chan is here.”

“Nia!”

As Kotori called out her name, Nia waved her hand around in relaxed manner as she climbed out onto the outer armor. While the other Spirits could leap out using their reiryoku and physical strength, this seemed unlikely for Nia who had to use a ladder instead.

“Uwaah! How scary! A world 15000 meters in the sky!? Falling off here would mean the end of the volume. Ah, but the cold weather and wind is fine here. As I thought, the Voluntary Territory is really useful! The power of science is amazing!”

Nia noisily shouted while glancing over at the edge of the ship and towards the ground. Looking out of place given the current situation, Kotori wearily half closed her eyes.

“What are you doing Nia? Even if the battle has been interrupted, isn’t it still dangerous to come out here?”

“Eh? Ah, that’s right. Look here.”

As if reminded by Kotori, Nia took out a small palm-sized machine from the backpack she was carrying.

“Un, now then, ah Manatee, could you stick this device on the cocoon-like thing?”

Nia handed the mysterious device to Mana, who tilted her head in curiosity.

“What is this?”

“The terminal of the observation device. Although, we can analyze by covering it with the Voluntary Territory, attaching this would allow grasping the interior structure more accurately.”

“Ah, I understand. But why did you come in person? We could have gone to the bridge to pick it up.”

“Hey, the Spirits are always being mobilized, but I’m always stuck on the bridge alone. That’s not something a true companion would do.”

“S-so that’s the reason.....”

Mana replied back with a vague expression as if not understanding but also finding it too troublesome to pursue any further.

“Please be careful Mana. Even though the resistance has stopped, we know nothing about this right now.”

“Un, I understand, you don’t need to remind me twice.”

After nodding back to Kotori, Mana gently bent her legs, using the recoil force to launch herself into the sky. Of course, the force came from the thrusters on her back, but the power source came from a mental image driven by the Realizer Manifestation Device. For Mana, her current movements were fueled by imagining herself to “move quickly”.

As Mana soon reached the cocoon, she slowly raised her hand while increasing the defensive power of the Voluntary Territory—attaching the observation device onto the surface.

“Fumu.....nothing happened.”

“Thank you Manatee. Now then, how should we do this?”

Nia spoke while squatting down, taking out a laptop from her backpack. The Spirits all gathered behind Nia to look at the screen.

However, as Nia struck the key, the image turned into static as if scrambled by a sandstorm.

“Hmm.....that’s not it. How about this.....”

Then.

“—Ufufu, how embarrassing for the omniscient Spirit.”

Just as Nia was racking her brain while striking the keyboard, a single girl appeared in front of them.

With hair unevenly tied together on both sides and a golden clock marked on her left eye——and together with a Gothic Lolita dress, a girl dressed in a renaissance style.

“Kurumi!”

Kotori subconsciously shouted her name.

That’s right. The girl who appeared there was the Worst Spirit, Tokisaki Kurumi.

But, the Astral Dress that was on her was somewhat different than before. Not in the complete state, but rather the limited Astral Dress version. In addition, it can be seen that the style was also different from the usual.

"That appearance is....."

"Gothic Lolita cross..... a cross right? Kuh....."

"Explain. A complete blow to Kaguya's key points."

“.....”

Looking at Kurumi's costume, the Spirits raised a fuss. Mana stared at Kurumi with annoyance, but it looked that she did not want to start a fight.

Even Kurumi now wasn't planning to oppose Kotori's group. That can be believed from the fact that she has entrusted her reiryoku to Shidou before. While it wasn't possible to fully understand her intentions, it was true that Shidou was able to confront Mio, in addition to the others, thanks to Kurumi.

Kurumi gazed at Kotori's complicated expression along with the Spirit's attitude and giggled, and then she raised her right hand gently.

And then, she called forth.

The name——of that Angel.

“—<Rasiel>.”

“What.....!”

When Kurumi uttered the name of the Angel, Nia rounded her eyes.

But there is nothing wrong with that. Anyhow, that is also the name of the Angel that Nia possessed from the beginning.

On the hand that Kurumi was raising, a giant book appeared. That book opened automatically, and its characters and letters shined brightly as usual.

Looking at that form, Nia screamed.



“Uwaa! Is it really Kurumin!? No well, that would be the case if you had retrieved my Sephira Crystal from that corrupt Director, but does that also mean that my position in this is not needed!? This is an identity crisis!”

“Please be quiet. This is my first time controlling this Angel, so let me concentrate.”

“Ugh..... Is this NTR? It hurts”

It was unclear why Nia hugged her shoulders as her body was trembling.

Kotori temporarily ignored it, turning her gaze towards Kurumi.

“—So how is it? Where's Shidou?”

“Shidou-san... yes, he's alright.”

“.....!”

At the words of Kurumi, the Spirits' expression brightened up. Kotori, who was also trying to hide her emotions, sighed in relief.

But then.

“.....This is.....?”

Kurumi looked at <Rasiel>'s pages, and then raised her eyebrows up while mumbling to herself.



—The first thing felt was the scorching heat.

It was just like being roasted on hot iron plate.

And also the light. The dazzling light passed through his tightly closed eyelids, constantly stimulating his retinas.

“Un.....”

With a small groan, Shidou stirred his body. Finally, he noticed that he was lying on his back.

An uncomfortable feeling arose in his turbid consciousness. —Had he fainted? Was it a dream? The thoughts generated by a feeling of waking up gradually brought Shidou back to reality. After a full ten seconds, Shidou's consciousness fully recovered.

“That's right, I—”

Shidou slowly began to reconnect the sequence of events before passing out.

He had been entrusted with Kurumi's reiryoku—and then kissed Mio in order to seal her power.

“.....!”

The moment after remembering this, Shidou's eyes sprung open as he snapped back on his feet.

—What on earth happened? Mio? Kurumi? Everyone? Why was he lying down? What was that heat burning his body just now? What happened when he lost consciousness—

“.....Ha?”

Contrary to the thoughts rushing like surging waves, what came out from his mouth was a simple mark of confusion.

However, if placed in a similar situation, there was no doubt that one would have a similar reaction.

Since the surroundings were—just the calm seaside scenery.

Not in the skies, not on <Fraxinus>, not even in the monochrome space created by Mio. There was no Angel in the shape of a gigantic flower or an Angel, nor an Angel with the form of a huge tree, even the Spirits were not in sight. The surrounding scenery in front of him was the ocean's vast body of water and the insurmountable lofty skies. The vibration from the returning waves rang in his eardrums as the familiar sounds from seagulls were heard from time to time.

“Here.....”

While speaking, Shidou noticed—this familiar scenery.

That's right. It was the coast that Shidou had chosen for his date with Reine.

But not everything was the same as his memory. A slight difference was seen at a glance.

The waves were new. The amount of concrete bricks seemed to be lacking. Perhaps it was a figment of his imagination, but even the sea felt more transparent.

And the most obvious fact—the season was different.

The cold weather of February, the freezing chill that caused people to shiver had completely disappeared. Instead, the sun was shining just like early summer.

If he had to describe it, it was like—

“.....Shin.”

“Uhya!?”

While in the midst of thinking, Shidou felt his shoulders tremble as a sudden voice called to him.

While pushing his hands against the beach, he turned to the direction of that voice, standing there was Reine wearing in a refreshing dress.

“R-reine-san.....!?”

Shidou couldn't help but raise the volume of his reply.

But that was natural. After all, the opponent that he had just been engaged with in a fierce defensive and offensive struggle had suddenly called out for him. It was inevitable to be surprised.

Moreover—there was one more point. The reason for Shidou to stare in open bafflement.

Because over there was not “Mio”, but rather “Reine”, the assistant teacher of Shidou's class and analytic officer of <Ratatoskr>.

“W-what's going on, this is.....everyone? <Fraxinus>.....?”

“.....Hand.”

Rather than replying back, she reached out her hand towards him.

“Eh? A-ah.....thank you.”

Despite being aware of the lack of response, Shidou still took her hand to stand up.

Perhaps this mysterious space was Reine's doing—looking from her appearance; it didn't seem she harbored any malice to him.

But before that, he didn't understand why she appeared as Reine now. Certainly, after Mio emerged from Kurumi, she should have merged with her to return back to a complete form—

“—Hey, over here!”

At that moment.

Shidou's thoughts were interrupted by a voice coming from behind.

Looking over there, he recognized the girl waving to them from the side of the beach with a young boy standing next to her.

“Ha—”

Staring at that figure, Shidou held in his breath.

But that was to be expected as well. —About that, the scene was abnormal.

First, there was the girl beckoning to them. She was a beautiful girl that looked to be 16 years old, wearing a white dress and a wide straw hat. The tips of her loosely braided hair were lightly swaying as she was waving.

—Mio. The moment that figure was caught in his sight, that name appeared instantly in Shidou's mind.

No doubt about it. It was the Spirit of Origin, Mio Takamiya herself.

“Eh.....”

Shidou couldn't help but glance back at the side towards Reine. This sense of presence wasn't something felt in an illusion or hallucination.

“Mio” and “Reine”, both of whom should be the same person, existed as separate individuals here.

Nonetheless, it was not something to be too surprised about at this point. Although he didn't know the reason for separating, Shidou already knew Mio and Reine could splitter from each other, coexisting as two parallel existences.

What really surprised Shidou was the appearance of the boy standing right next to Mio.

—A young boy with a neutral facial expression dressed in cool summer attire. While standing next to Mio, he was looking back at Shidou with a demeanor that looked almost bashful.

Staring at that boy's face, he lost the ability to speak. Since Shidou was most familiar with that face in the whole world.

“M-me.....?”

Suddenly, those words leaked out.

That's right. There was a boy who looked exactly the same as Shidou—no, even that was not enough to describe it; the boy had the same identical face as him.

For a moment, Shidou felt the illusion of seeing his own doppelgänger. An urban legend and ghost story of a stranger with an identical face, it is said that a person who encountered one would die.

.....Since Shidou has already died several times now. Perhaps, it wasn't strange that such a person had appeared.

—However. Shidou immediately guessed his true identity.

“No.....it's different. You are—”

While looking at his own face once more, Shidou quietly whispered that name.

“—Shin. Takamiya Shinji.....?”

After Shidou spoke, the boy loosened his cheeks as he replied back.

“Ah. Anyway, this is.....our first meeting?”

While speaking, Shinji shrugged his shoulders.

Although Shidou could confirm that this was indeed Shinji, he still couldn't understand the situation and frowned.

“This is.....what the heck. Moreover, this location.....”

As Shidou mumbled dismayingly, Reine twitched her soft lips while replying to him.

“Apparently.....it seems that this space was formed by <Ain Soph>.”

“So you're saying.....that this space wasn't created by Reine-san?”

“.....That is most likely the case. At the very least there is no doubt that this phenomenon is derived from my power. But.....honestly, there wasn't much awareness on my part for this.”

“Then, what you mean is.....”

As Shidou inquired, Reine touched her lips with her fingertips.

“.....At that time, did you kiss me?”

“.....Yes.”

Hearing that unexpected question, Shidou was surprised. But for sure. The warming feeling of Mio's shoulders and the softness of her lips were still vividly clear in his memory.

“.....It seems at that time the memories shared by the pathway are being reproduced. In that case, in order to create a state closer to the memory, “I” and “Mio”, as well as “Shidou” and “Shin” have had our consciousness separated.”

“Ah.....so that's the reason. But why did it become like that.....”

As Shidou continued to quietly ponder, Mio unexpectedly grabbed Shidou and Reine's hands.

“It's not nice to just stand around. —Compared to that, shall we play together? It's rare coming to the beach.”

Mio displayed a carefree smile as she spoke.

From just that expression, he couldn't see the dangerous deep-rooted delusion that was present before. It looked as if Mio had returned back to herself from thirty years ago—from before the death of Shinji.

“Huh? No, I.....”

As Shidou struggled to speak in a flustered state, Mio pulled his hand over, cutting him off halfway.



“The DEM fleet has been annihilated by <Deus>!”

“The <Bandersnatch> corps that appeared everywhere have been destroyed by the Spirits!”

“<Deus> has swallowed Itsuka Shidou and formed a force field!”

On the bridge of the <Ratatoskr> airship, the amount of various reports flung around was staggering. The situation on the battlefield was changing rapidly. Notices of good and bad news intermingled within the chaos. It sparked a storm of information that made grasping the overall situation difficult.

However, all of the information was concentrated into a single report.

“—Besides <Deus>, all of the Spirits—everyone is alright!”

Hearing that broadcast, the crew members of <Ulmus> breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Due to everyone on the bridge wanting to breathe out unobtrusively as possible, the sheer number of people caused an unexpected loud sound to be introduced to Woodman’s ear. —Which was then accompanied by a fake cough as if to cover this up.

Woodman listened to these series of sounds as he relaxed his tighten cheeks.

“—It seems that I’ve managed to avoid death. I didn’t expect <Nightmare> would attack Ike.”

“Yes. I’ll have to thank her later.”

Karen, who was standing behind Woodman, replied back in an orderly manner. Despite her tone being as flat as a paved road, it was clear from her long time being associated with Woodman that she was both relieved and delighted at the same time.

Even so, the state of affairs still had to be handled with extreme caution. Not everything was over yet.

“How is the situation with <Deus>?”

“—Yes. It’s currently under investigation.....there’s no detailed news yet, but we’ll report to you as soon as a report is sent from <Fraxinus>.”

A crew member on the lower bridge responded back to Woodman’s inquiry. Woodman replied back with “ah, I’m counting on it” before returning his attention back to the main monitor.

A cocoon-like object that boasted a smooth surface. Although <Deus>’s intentions with this object were unknown, the battle was not over until they could confirm the safety of both her and Shidou who were swallowed whole by this.

“The best result is both of them coming out safely.....but what will happen then?”

Woodman whispered as he stroked his beard and squint his eyes.

In addition to <Deus> on this battlefield, there was still one more concern still remaining.

“So, what about Ike—Westcott?”

Yes, it’s been about 120 seconds since Isaac Westcott fled the battlefield with Ellen Mathers and Artemisia Ashcroft after being robbed of his Sephira Crystal by <Nightmare>. While his whereabouts disappeared, it’s like they had escaped and were lurking somewhere in the ground.

The crew members raised their head after looking at their personal monitors.

“Of course we are still being on the watch for a surprise attack from Ellen Mathers and Artemisia Ashcroft.....but having lost the Sephira Crystal and had the fleet destroyed, should Isaac Westcott still be considered a threat? And even before that.....with that injury there is the possibility of already being dead.”

After listening to the crew, Woodman sighed.

“Do you think so.....no, it’s impossible. It’s true from the information gathered that he had suffered a complete defeat. He is a man who vigorously rallied his subordinates to battle without the slightest hesitation for their lives. It’s difficult to image what role he will still have.”

—But Woodman continued on.

“The man named Isaac Westcott will not end here. —It won’t stop this unpleasant premonition. That genius won’t let the curtain fall like this.”

After Woodman finished speaking, the crew members gulped upon seeing this unusual expression.

“U-understood, commencing search—”

Then.

Just as the crew members began to talk, a sharp alarm began to resound on the bridge of <Ulmus>.

“What happened?”

Karen asked the crew in a calm voice. After confirming the data, her subordinates replied back in a stifled voice.

“This is.....a spirit wave response! An unusually huge spirit wave response is being produced very close to <Fraxinus>!”

“What did you say—”

Karen’s words stopped midway through.

“.....”

But the reason was quickly understood by Woodman.

She was also one of the few genuine Magicians in this world. She had likely felt it just like Woodman. Thinking of this familiar feeling—it was a strange sense of déjà vu.

“Elliot, this can’t be.”

“Ah. There’s no doubt. —The Spirit Formula.”

From Karen’s words, Woodman, with a grim look, expressed his affirmation.

Yes. There was no mistake about it. It was impossible to be a mistake.

This rich flow of magic—just like thirty years ago, it was the same as when Woodman and the others created the Spirit of Origin.



“Ha.....ah, haha.”

“W-wait a moment, Mio.....”

Under the blue sky and with beads of sweat dripping from their foreheads, Shidou and Shinji made an exhausted plea.

But it was impossible to not be tired. After all Shidou and Shinji had done everything possible on the beach from swimming in the seawater, building sandcastles, coastal fishing, watermelon splitting, and finally even beach volleyball.

At first glance, it looked like four good friends. Or a high school trio being led by a teacher.

—Or a double date consisting of two couples.

“Ah, sorry. It was just so much fun.....”

“.....Yes. Let’s take a break for a while.”

Mio and Reine both spoke as they snapped their fingers at the same time.

Then, something resembling particles of light gathered from the surroundings. Then, camping tables, chairs, and a beach umbrella appeared, with cold drinks placed on the table.

It was a magical sight. Despite already seeing this before with the watermelons and fishing rods, it still amazed Shidou seeing this.

“Really, everything just popped out.....”

“.....Inside a small portion of <Ain Soph>’s neighboring world, willpower in this world has an effect on reality. Although a Wizard’s Voluntary Territory works on a similar principle, it would

be impossible for material to appear though. Shin—no Shidou, you also have the same reiryoku. If you grow accustomed to it, you should also be able to do this as well.”

Reine changed his name at the last second. Well, since Shinji was also here, it would be a bit confusing to also call him Shin.

“Really?”

“Can I do that too?”

As Shinji questioned on with excitement, Reine placed her hand against her jaw with a difficult look on her face.

“.....Hard to say. Although Shidou has sealed the reiryoku of the Spirits, Shin is an ordinary human being so to speak. It would depend on how much of your existence was divided when recreated.”

“I-is that so.....”

Shinji’s shoulders drooped as he looked on at Shidou with envy.

“.....That must be nice, reiryoku.Since you’re also me, can you give me a bit?”

“Ahh.....”

As Shidou made a strained smile with sweat dripping down his cheeks, Shinji began to continue begging in earnest.

“I’m begging you. —<Rasiel>, <Zafkiel>, <Michael>, <Haniel>, <Gabriel>, anyone would do.”

“Leave the Angels for battle to me!”

Perhaps due to being an existence separated from Shidou, Shinji also had some knowledge about the Angels. A very accurate selection of Angels that was precisely useful. As Shidou was caught in an awkward dilemma, Shinji laughed as he extended his hand as if to comfort Shidou.

“Just kidding. Not to mention it’s rare for them to intentionally give this much preparation. Let’s take a break. My throat is already dry.”

“Ahh.....yes.”

As they finished speaking, Shidou sat down on the newly appeared chair on the sandy beaching, pouring the tropical-scented juice into the elegant glass and down his throat.

The sweetness and sourness of the refreshing fruit was absorbed into his thirsty body. Chugging it down, Shidou finished the drink in a single stroke.

“Fuha.....!”

It felt like his voice had overlapped with something. Looking across the table, Shinji had displayed the same expression as Shidou.

“Fufu.”

“.....It’s just like a mirror, right?”

Reine and Mio smiled while looking on at them. Feeling a bit embarrassed, Shidou averted his gaze.....but even this act was done simultaneously with Shinji.

.....It’s no wonder, after all the two of them were originally the same person. It might have been unavoidable that even their subtle movements were similar to each other.

As Shidou was thinking this over, a lovely voice was heard from across the table.

“Ku.....”

“Ahaha, it seems like my stomach is calling.”

Mio spoke with a small chuckle. Perhaps the juice they drank was stimulating the stomach. Although after playing as much as they did, being hungry would be natural.

“.....Hmm, then let’s get something to eat.”

“Yeah, Shin and Shidou, do you have any requests?”

While speaking, Reine and Mio twirled their index finger like a magician tracing a circle in the air. If done by them, any dish would be reproduced in a flash.

But then, Shinji seemed have thought up of something as he struck the palm of his hand with his fist.

“Ah, yes, if we can settle it this way. Mio, can you bring out kitchen ingredients and some ingredients?”

“Kitchenware and ingredients?”

“Ah—is Shidou capable as well?”

Shinji spoke with a glint in his eyes as he made his way to his kitchen knife to begin preparing some vegetables. Shidou let out a “.....Huh?” sound as his eyebrows faintly twitched.

“Are you serious? Do you really want to?”

“Ah. Even for a rare meal, just having the finished product popped out wouldn’t necessarily be tasty, right? Since there are two judges here, let’s let them decide which one is tastier. The theme should be.....let’s see, how about the staple of every beach house, yakisoba?”

“Alright, then I accept your challenge. Let me see your strength!”

Shidou stood up after accepting Shinji’s proposal.

While watching them, Reine and Mio exchanged a cheerful smile to each other before snapping their fingers at the same time.

At the next moment, gorgeous cooking tables, large iron plates, and a colorful variety of vegetables and meat appeared on the sandy beach. Incidentally, aprons also attached themselves to Shidou and Shinji's bodies unnoticed.

“Oh.....!”

“Haha.....this really is amazing.”

Shidou and Shinji both shared a laugh—standing in front of their cooking stations as they began to work.

“Ohhhhhhh!”

“Haaaaa!”

Both of them gave a fighting scream while dicing the cabbages and carrots. Although there was no need for that, such was the atmosphere.

Then, without pause, they swiftly poured oil into the iron pan, adding in the vegetables, meat, and noodles before finally seasoning it with the sauce.

Soon, both cooks completed their works almost simultaneously.

Their respective yakisoba was then served on a plate in front of Reine and Mio.

“.....Ho.”

“Wow.....!”

Both of them raised a sound of admiration to the aromatic scent, looking closely to compare which of the two dishes was better.

“.....They look almost the same. Both are likely to be delicious.”

“Un, Shin and Shidou were originally the same person in the first place, so wouldn't the difference not be too big?”

Then, the two chefs issued out their desires for an evaluation.

Shidou and Shinji both raised the corners of their lips and spread out their hands as a gesture to the judges.



“How about it? Anyway, eat it while it’s still hot!”

“Bon appétit!”

As Shidou and Shinji finished speaking, Reine and Mio both pressed their hands together and said “itadakimasu” at the same time before beginning to eat the yakisoba.

“.....Hmm, it’s good.”

“Un, tasty.”

As the two of them finished their yakisoba, they slowly exchanged glances, nodding to each other.

Through his act, Shidou and Shinji realized that the two of them had come to a decision.

“Come on.....!”

“Please tell us which one was more delicious!”

After Shidou and Shinji asked nervously, Reine and Mio picked up a selection tag that appeared on the table unnoticed and revealed to them both at the same time.

—Both of their choice cards were written with the name “Shidou”.

“Alright!”

“Why is it like that——!?”

As Shidou took a victory pose, Shinji fell to his knees on the sandy beach. Shidou looked on at him and grinned.

“—Don’t you understand, Shinji. It’s because you didn’t have enough control over the iron plates.”

“W-what.....!?”

As Shinji raised his face, Shidou continued on while holding his spatula.

“Your technique is powerful.....if this had been a battle with frying pans, the result may have been a draw. But if you make yakisoba using an iron plate, it would be wasteful not to use the large surface area to not fully fry each individual noodle. By doing this, the exterior becomes crispier while inside the mouth.”

“Wha.....but, there shouldn’t be any iron plates in your daily life! Where did you guys get that technology.....!?”

Shinji shivered as he opened his eyes. Seeing this, Shidou could only sigh before speaking.

“—Too naïve. How many times do you think I’ve cooked for the Spirits on a regular basis? The number of pans I’ve carried is different from you!”

“Guhaaaaaaaaaa—!”

As Shidou raised a finger while spoke, Shinji buried his chest face up onto the sandy beach.

Then, Reine and Mio, who were looking at the two of them curiously, tilted their heads.

“.....Aren’t you two going to eat?”

“Isn’t it getting cold?”

“Ah, yes.”

“Itadakimasu.”

Shidou and Shinji both sat down, untying their aprons and began to eat each other’s yakisoba.

“Wow, it tastes so crispy.....it’s really delicious.”

“Really? Un, but isn’t Shinji’s also quite delicious?”

“C’mon, sometimes pity is also cruel. Damn—I didn’t want to lose to myself.....”

Shinji resignedly groaned while twisting his body. Mio then placed her hand on his shoulder as if to comfort him.

“Cheer up. I like Shin’s dishes better.”

“Mio.....”

Although Shinji felt his eyes moisten, he immediately raised his brow in question.

“But Mio, didn’t you choose Shidou as the victor?”

“Huh? That’s because you said to choose the more delicious one.”

“.....”

After listening to what Mio had said, Shinji perched back up to the table while maintaining the stiff smile on his face.

“How merciless.....”

An innocence that could be sometimes cruel, Shidou shrugged while smiling softly.

Then, as if matching that rhythm, Reine placed down her chopsticks after finishing the yakisoba, muttering out her thanks for the meal as she turned her eyes back to Shidou and the others.

“.....Well then, let us treat you to something next. It’s rare to come to the ocean. How about shaved ice?”

“Oh, that sounds good. What flavor would you two like?”

As Mio tilted her head while asking, both Shidou and Shinji answered back at the same time without any particular hesitation.

“Well then, with strawberry.”

“Well then, with melon.”

Hearing each other’s reply, Shidou and Shinji unexpectedly turned to face each other.

“Ah, Shinji is part of the melon faction?”

“Well, it’s not absolutely necessary to have that taste, since I used to eat a lot of cantaloupes before. So, I take it Shidou prefers the strawberry flavor?”

“Since Kotori loves the strawberry flavor, it kind of just became natural to eat it like that. Well, regardless the ice syrup has the same taste basically; it’s only the color and fragrance that’s different.”

“Hehe, that’s right. It’s also fun to try eating a different flavor.”

At the same time, Shidou and Shinji both lifted their heads in an “Hmm?” sounding gesture.

The reason was simple. Both Reine and Mio were looking on at their conversation with a deeply moved expression.

“.....Hmm?”

“What’s wrong, Mio?”

As Shidou and Shinji both asked, Reine and Mio both looked down at the same time.

“Nothing.”

“.....It’s nothing. Besides, look here.”

While saying that, the two of them snapped their fingers.

Then, four plates of shimmering shaved ice appeared on the table.

“Well, please.”

“.....Bon appétit.”

“Oh!”

“Itadakimasu!”

At the same time, Shidou and Shinji pressed their hands together in thanks for the meal, moving the shaved ice to their mouths. At the same time, they each pressed their foreheads with their respective hands because of a headache from eating the chilly ice too fast.

“Ku.....”

“Whyyyy.....”

Looking at the comical scene between the two, Reine and Mio giggled as they also began to enjoy the dessert. Incidentally, Reine had chosen the strawberry flavor while Mio preferred the melon flavor.

“Fu.....”

After ten seconds, the headache finally subsided. Shidou softly sighed, looking at Reine and Mio eating the delicious shaved ice before once again turning to gaze at the surrounding scenery.

The seemingly endless sea, the scorching sun, it was all signs of an early season of summer. Despite having played all sorts of games for at least five hours now, there was still no sign of the sun sinking into the horizon yet.

Yes. It was as if Shinji and Mio’s visit to the ocean was being instantly cut off from the world so that it could continue on forever.

Moreover, according to Reine, the flow of time within <Ain Soph> was different from that of the outside world. It seemed that only a few minutes at most had passed outside.

Nevertheless, Shidou understood that this situation was not one where he could keep leisuring around. Although Westcott had been repelled, the Spirits were still waiting for his return in the outside world. Even if time was delayed outside, that point remained unchanged.

However, Shidou had not been able to achieve his goal yet. Besides——

“.....”

Shidou turned to look at Mio’s face.

From the bottom of her heart, Mio enjoyed talking with Shinji. It was an undeniable fact that he could never refuse her invitation.

But having said that—he could help but feel that her feelings for Mio were different than before he was swallowed into this space.

No, he still cherished Mio, that fondness remained unchanged.

However, when remembering back, this emotion was obviously different from the almost cursed feelings of attachment felt not so long ago

That wasn't all. It was the same regarding Shinji's memories. Until being caught in <Ain Soph>, the intense degree of Shinji's obsession was to the point where it felt like it would even dominate his own actions. But now that pain was completely concealed.

Of course, he still had the memories from 30 years ago—but simply put; the sensation of that “feeling” had begun to fade.

“.....Does the feelings of Shin no longer have a role——?”

“——!?”

Suddenly hearing Reine's voice unexpectedly, Shidou felt a slight tremble reach his shoulders.

Across the table, Shinji and Mio were still smiling happily. In order to not disturb them, Shidou replied back with a voice below a whisper.

“.....Can you read minds through this space?”

“No, just speculation from your facial expression.I wonder if you were the same as me.”

“Huh——?”

While listening to Reine, Shidou couldn't help but widen his eyes. Then, Reine continued speaking quietly.

“.....When my existence was separated, the feelings as “Mio” may have gone to that Mio over there. Of course, there are still memories but.....how to describe it, it's a mysterious feeling. It seems that I have really become Murasame Reine.”

“Reine-san.....”

Shidou whispered while turning his eye to the side towards Shinji and Mio.

Suddenly, he remembered the cooking competition. Shidou proved to be triumphant, but as he said himself, his victory was attributed to the Spirits' existences.

It wasn't just limited to that. It was possible that Shidou and Shinji were originally the same existence, but the various events experienced in his life thus far had shaped his current personality.

No longer were they the same. Such an idea appeared in Shidou's thoughts once again.

And if that was for sure——

“.....”

Shidou tightly bit his lip as he took in a few deep breaths for a couple of seconds—and then he raised his voice as if having come to a decision.

“.....Hey, Mio, Shinji.”

“Hmm? What’s wrong, Shidou?”

“What? Is it a fried rice matchup next? This time I won’t lose.”

Mio tilted her head while Shinji replied back while assuming a fighting pose.

With a bitter smile, he tersely replied with a “no”, glancing quickly at Reine before continuing to speak.

“For some exercise, can we go for a walk.....together?”

Hearing Shidou’s proposal, Shinji and Mio nodded after exchanging a brief glance at each other.

—Four footprints were drawn on the seemingly endless beach before being erased by the returning waves after a while.

Each time a cold sensation was felt as their feet sank slightly into the sand.

The caress of the warm sunshine and sea breeze on his cheeks. Everything was integrated together in order to allow Shidou to feel the arrival of summer.

Although at this place, it could only be the arrival of a false summer.

“Un—”

Walking ahead, Mio stretched as she took in a deep breath.

“Really—it’s so comfortable. Fufu, thank you for bringing us here Shin.”

As Mio spoke, Shinji, who was walking beside her, gave a cheerful but also somewhat bashful smile.

“You being happy made it all worth it. It wasn’t easy to search for a place with a good landscape. And if it is too far, then we won’t be able to go. Apparently, there is something called a smartphone in Shidou’s era. It’s too unfair. It’s too convenient to be able to collect all of the world’s information anytime and anywhere.”

Shinji joked on as he helplessly shrugged. Seeing this, Shidou forced a smile amidst his vague expression.

“.....Shidou.”

While also observing the same situation as him, Reine quietly whispered his name. Shidou gently nodded, replying back with “I’m fine” in a voice that only Reine could hear.

Not noticing the conversation behind them, Shinji and Mio continued to engrave their footprints on the beach.

“—Ah, I’ve always wanted to try that. Fireworks. Wouldn’t the ocean be perfect for fireworks? 30 years ago, we never got the chance since we head back during the evening.”

“I-it couldn’t be helped. If we head back late, it would have caused Mana to be worried from the misunderstanding.....”

“Fufu, there’s sure to be more fun to be had in the future. —I’d also like to try diving and barbeque. Let’s go to the city later. Me, Shin, Reine, Shidou. Ah, it will definitely be fun. Really, I wish this time will continue going for forever.”

Mio spoke with an energetic voice.

A look of pure happiness—as if exposing what she truly wanted from the bottom of her heart.

That was why there was a pause in reply.

“—Oh, I see.”

But he had to say this. Shidou clenched his fist as he continued.

“But.....it won’t last forever. Right.....Mio?”

“——”

At that moment.

Mio’s feet that were strolling along the beach came to a sudden stop.

After a couple of seconds, Mio turned back to Shidou and Reine, speaking with a lonely smile on her face.

“Sorry. I forced Shidou to say it.”

“Mio.....”

Right beside her, Shinji called out Mio’s name in a heavy tune as he tried to touch his shoulder. However, his hand stopped midway, biting against his lip as he lower his hand.

Like Mio, Shinji had also noticed it. And of course—Reine as well. Everyone in <Ain Soph> noticed it, but couldn’t speak. The idea that it would be fine if this moment lasted forever—even Shidou also thought about that.

However, there would have to come a time for a person to draw down the curtains.

If so, then that would surely be Shidou’s role.

Shidou closed his eyes briefly and then he opened his mouth as if having made up his mind.

“.....After kissing Reine-san, Mio’s memories came through the pathway. At first, I didn’t understand what it was or what it meant. But gradually, I finally understand.”

Shidou wiped away the tears that leaked out as he continued looking directly at Mio's eyes.

"Mio, you recreated me in order to resurrect Shinji, right?"

".....Un."

Mio gently nodded.

That's right. This had been Mio's wish for 30 years.

For the sake of remaking the old life of a cherished person that had once died, an act of divine will consistent with the name of <Deus>.

"There's no mistake. That's your hope and wish. But.....that's not all. Since even the Shinji here isn't the real Shinji."

"....."

Listening to Shidou's words, Shinji looked towards him. But he didn't say anything.

Shinji also likely knew. That he was a fictional person made from a severed part of Shidou's memories.

As it was, Mio should have also understood this point.

Despite recognizing this from the very beginning, she forced herself to rely on that image.

Even if it wasn't the genuine Shinji, perhaps a counterfeit in his image and possessing his memories would be sufficient enough to fill the empty hole in her heart.

Actually, that wasn't a mistake either.

But after kissing Reine, Shidou had reached another possibility.

Why did Mio give Shidou the power to seal reiryoku—a power that could be called the natural enemy for all Spirits.

It arrived upon that question.

Of course, there were reasons for dividing the reiryoku piece by piece to prevent the human body from being overwhelmed.

For that reason, many girls were sacrificed and Shidou transformed into a state not so different from a Spirit.

However—

"I'm not sure if you are already aware, but looking at your memory from another perspective....."

(—I had only Shin. If I lost Shin, there was no meaning to living.)

Mio's voice revived itself in his mind.

(—I'm not as weak as humans, even if I wanted to die I couldn't die.)

Shidou collapsed onto his knees—as he struggled to speak.

“Mio, in order to create an existence that could kill yourself, you gave birth to me.”

To those words.

“.....”

Mio didn't answer back—but she smiled sadly.



“—So what happened to Shidou, Kurumi”

“What the hell is going on inside there? Is Shidou together with Mio?”

“Kya! That's too crafty! Why didn't they bring me along!?”

“Eh? Perhaps you don't know? Perhaps you don't understand Kurumin? Sure enough, an unfamiliar Angel must be difficult. Then how about returning Rasielmon back to me?”

“Please • be • quiet!”

While fumbling through the pages of the book Angel <Rasiel> about the circumstances inside the cocoon, Kurumi raised her voice against the surround noise.

In an instant, on the shadow of <Fraxinus>'s outer layer, countless clones leaped out to chase away the Spirits swarming around Kurumi. Kurumi sighed while scratching her head.

In short, <Ratatoskr>'s Spirits gathered around just as Kurumi was beginning her investigation. Raising a clamor and grabbing her skirt, they only took actions that would interfere with her.

“I understand that you are all worried about Shidou-san, but please be quiet! It's distracting! Also Miku-san! Stop trying to lift up my skirt from behind during the confusion!”

As Kurumi screamed, the Spirits all nodded back apologetically. From one side a voice spoke, “I understand.....but Kurumi-san spoke like an invitation to come closer.” As one of the Spirits blurted out, Kurumi gave the command for the clones to tighten her clutch.

“Adadadada.”

“Really.....I understand how laborious your job is now, Kotori-san.”

“Thanks for that.”

As Kurumi finished speaking, Kotori, who was standing a father away from Mana and Natsumi, replied back with a dry smile. Despite being young in age, her mature stance resembled one who had experienced the daily hardships of life.

Kurumi sighed once again before reading the letters emerging on a page of <Rasiel>.

It was a mysterious feeling. By tracing her finger through the glimmering characters, a scene indicated by those words played in her head as a mental image. Moreover, through this condition, it was possible to learn everything in this world. Indeed, it was a foul performance appropriate for the Angel of omniscience.

“—Shidou-san, Mio-san.....as well as Murasame-sensei.....and also another Shidou-san.....? There are four people beside the ocean—just like the seashore located down below.”

Kurumi described the fragmentary image shown in her mind. Hearing this, the Spirits all gave astonished responses.

“Mun.....inside there are two Nushi-samas?”

“How.....strange.”

“Well, Mio and Reine separating again are understandable.....but does that cocoon have a proliferation effect?”

“Wait a minute.....I don’t know. Let me search why—”

Just at the moment where Kurumi was about to search more information through <Rasiel>.

“——!?”

The Spirits on the exterior of <Fraxinus> trembled as their eyes opened widely.

Of course, Kurumi was not an exception. She stopped her finger from tracing <Rasiel>’s page as she frantically looked around.

The reason was simple. A tremendous reiryoku had arisen right near the vicinity of <Fraxinus>.

Incidentally, only Nia, who had lost the majority of her Sephira Crystal, didn’t notice it. But after seeing everyone’s reaction, she immediately pretended to give off the same shocked impression.

“What happened—this is.....!”

“Spirit wave response.....!? Where is it coming from!?”

“.....E-everyone, over there!”

Yoshino raised her voice as if noticing something. The others Spirits looked at the direction she pointed to in alarm.

Everyone was left momentarily speechless.

<Goetia>, the airborne ship that was attached to <Fraxinus>'s flank.

Unprecedentedly, the exterior was enveloped by a dense reiryoku that radiated a glimmering light.

“This is——!?”

“<Goetia>.....!?”

The Spirits raised a voice in horror.

But that was to be expected. Westcott had been fatally injured and Ellen and Artemisia had fled escaping with him. There should have been no one left on <Goetia>.

No way, perhaps they triggered the self-destruct function now that they could no longer win? That was not an unthinkable idea coming from that wicked Wizard. Kurumi frowned in annoyance.

“Fu——”

“Tch——”

At the next moment, two shadows passed through Kurumi's field of vision. —Origami and Mana. It seemed that they were heading to eliminate <Goetia> after judging it to be a dangerous threat. As one would expect from former AST members, it was a reaction time fast enough to be charming.

However——

“Ku.....!”

“Wha.....!”

Their attacks never reached <Goetia>. As Origami and Mana were approaching <Goetia>, they were intercepted in route.

“——It's futile. The operation ceremony has already been activated. No one can stop it now.”

“Sorry. But——this looks like the end.”

Two DEM Wizards appeared on the other side of the sky, Ellen Mathers and Artemisia Ashcroft.

“Ellen, Artemisia.....!?”

Kotori's face stained in shock as she confirmed the identities of those two.

Then, as if to match that, a third voice echoed from somewhere.

“——Ah, I believed in Itsuka Shidou. That you guys would surely assist in stopping <Deus>.”

“.....That voice——”

Kurumi distorted her expression as she glanced towards <Goetia>.

Then from that shadow, the figure of a person clad in light slowly stepped forward.

——With a bloodstain left behind on his chest, Isaac Westcott emerged.

“Westcott.....!”

Westcott laughed as if to respond to that outcry.

And then it came out——the words that herald ruin.

“——Rejoice my friends. For all of you are all at privilege of witnessing the birth of the Second Spirit of Origin.”

Chapter 5: And Her Choice Is

Quietly—

Time flowed ever so quietly.

The tiny neighborhood formed by <Ain Soph>. A fictional world that recreated the ocean from Shinji and Mio's memories.

On that beautiful dream-like beach, Shidou and Mio confronted each other silently.

While Shinji was standing beside Mio and Reine for Shidou, both of them choose not say anything.

Both of them knew. In order to break this silence, it had to come from either Shidou—or Mio.

—Since the words Shidou said to Mio were too cruel, merciless, and devastating.

A reckless remark that was not suitable for a girl who had wandered for 30 years in search for a reunion with her loved one.

If words had physical form, then it must have been like a sharp knife tearing the fingertips or an iron ball crushing apart everything.

However, Mio, who received this blow, was neither shedding tears nor flying into a rage, only smiling quietly.

It was as if she had accepted everything.

—As if to denote that Shidou's ruthless words were not completely unfounded.

“.....An existence that could kill myself.....”

Like a wave of sound reverberating in space, Mio's voice resounded.

“Certainly.....if my reiryoku is sealed, I would become an ordinary human being. —Even if that's not enough, I would be much more vulnerable compared to now. Truly, fragile enough to the point of a successful suicide.”

Mio muttered slowly as if contemplating what she had just said, and then she sighed while looking up at the sky.

“Ah—maybe that's it. Perhaps that is what I've wanted for a long time now.”

“Mio.....”

As Shidou called out her name with his voice slightly trembling, Mio spoke back in a tranquil tone that calmed him down.

“My plan to resurrect Shin wasn’t false. It became my hope. In order to once again meet with Shin who died on that day, I have lived for thirty years.”

But Mio continued on.

“—Like Shidou said, the doubts of whether Shin could truly be reborn always existed somewhere in my heart.But there was no other way. So I sealed this uneasiness and turned a blind eye to it. But if a new Shin is born, then this train of thought would be entirely clarified. I was thinking completely unfounded.”

Mio smiled in a troubled manner.

“.....It seems that I—hoped to die all this time. Even to go far as trying to make Shin immortal, but even that won’t ensure that Shin won’t die someday. Maybe it was because I couldn’t bear to live alone when Shin died.Ah—that’s right. Why didn’t I notice such a simple thing so far?”

As Mio spoke, she turned her back to Shidou while slowly walking on the beach. The trail of footprints on the sandy beach was immediately swept clean by the returning tide.

Mio came to a halt once more, taking in a deep breath before turning back to Shidou with a question.

“Then—understanding this while still coming to kiss me. That is to say that Shidou is going to kill me.....right?”

“.....”

“—”

Hearing what Mio had said, Reine knitted her brow while Shinji held his breath.

But both acts were reasonable. Shidou had kissed Mio after predicting everything. He came here after accepting everything. It was extremely natural to derive that answer.

“.....Oh.”

As Shidou nodded affirmatively, Mio faintly raised the position of her head as she uttered a broken response.

“—This way—”

“—Did you think that I would say that?”

“.....Huh?”

Listening to what Shidou had said next, Mio turned around with a surprised stare of astonishment.

Not only that, both Reine and Shinji had a similar expression on their faces while looking on at Shidou. Shidou continued on while looking directly into Mio’s eyes.

“You’re pushing such an outrageous role onto someone else. Sorry, but I’m not as daring as you are. If you were to die, who would want to shoulder that burden?”

As Shidou spoke decisively, Mio gave him a confused look while titling her head.

“.....Uh, then why?”

“I have decided, I——”

Shidou made his declaration as he raised his finger and pointed towards Mio.

“——Mio, I came here to steal you from Shinji.”

“——”

Hearing what Shidou said, Mio widened her eyes in surprise. Shidou continued to press forth for an answer.

“I have all ten Sephira Crystals in my body thanks to Kurumi. Honestly, there’s not much difference between myself and a Spirit now. I may even be able to seal your reiryoku. Of course, as long as you don’t choose death for yourself. —So that’s why. Hehehe, forget about the old days with him and move on to me, Mio.”

Shidou feigned a wicked expression, folding his arms together while saying such a thing.

Mio stared blankly dumbfounded for a brief moment, but then——

“——Fu, fufu, ahahahaha——”

Then, she bursted out laughing.

“What is this? That doesn’t suit you at all, Shidou. Are you being serious?”

“S-suit me or not, screw that....I’m being serious! I really will steal you from Shinji’s hands!”

“Fufu.....is that so.”

While wiping away the tears from laughter, Mio turned her eyes towards Shinji, who was standing nearby.

“.....So that’s what he’s saying. What are you going to do, Shin?”

While saying that, Mio’s lips shaped into a smile in amusement. Shinji spat out a sigh as he shrugged his shoulders with a helpless look.

“Is it really alright for me open my mouth? Certainly, I am indeed Takamiya Shinji, but only as an existence separated from Shidou’s memories.....a counterfeit of a counterfeit so to speak?”

“But doesn’t that memory indeed belong to Shin? Let’s talk. Your thoughts should be the same as the real one. —Otherwise, perhaps I might be taken away by Shidou?”

As Mio said mischievously, Shinji's eyebrows began to twitch.

"Alright. Then let me tell you——"

After taking in a deep breath, Shinji turned to face Shidou, glaring at him while spewing out his words.

"——Don't screw around, you bastard! As if someone could remain silent after hearing that! Even for Shidou (me), I would never allow that! I will absolutely, absolutely, never hand Mio over to you!"

"H-hey.....!"

Confronted by this fiercely and menacing look, Shidou inadvertently stepped a few spaces back.

No, Shidou knew exactly how much Shinji cherished Mio before his death. But witnessing it like this, it was still unbelievably shocking.

However, after shouting for a while, Shinji let out a huge sigh as he hanged his eyes downward.

".....Well, those are the feelings coming from my life. If you are joking about stealing Mio, I would never allow it. ——But."

Shinji slowly raised his eyes up, gazing at Mio with an affectionate—but also somewhat lonely expression.

".....I am no longer here, right?"

"....."

Listening to Shinji's words, Mio fell silent. Shinji continued on while taking a step towards Mio.

"Even if it is Shidou (me), I'm unable to standby and allow Mio to choose anyone other than myself. Honestly, my heart feels like it is going to split open. ——But, it's because of that I can't agree with Mio choosing death. There were still so many things in this world that I wanted to show Mio. There were still so many places I wanted to take Mio. There were still so many things I wanted Mio to experience."

Shinji slowly raised his hand to gently stroke Mio's head.

".....The ocean is beautiful. It was nice to be able to bring Mio here.But it's almost time for me to go. ——Sorry, Mio. For my sake, you've shackled yourself for the past 30 years."

"....."

Mio didn't answer.

In exchange for saying that, Shinji turned to Shidou's direction. Afterwards, he gently nodded to him.

For Shidou, Shinji's intentions were already well known. Despite the sensation having been diminished, the memories of Shinji also remained within himself.

That's why—Shidou extended her hand to Mio.

“Mio.....!”

“.....Shidou, I—”

Mio slightly raised her face as if wanting to say something.

However—at that moment.

In the calm and serene seaside scenery, a sudden noise had struck, and then the whole world began to tremble as if vibrating to the sound of an earthquake.

“.....!? W-what happened!?”

“Uwa——!?”

From this abrupt situation, Shidou couldn't help but choke on his breathing as he swept his eyes around his surroundings. Shinji also had a similar reaction as he frantically looked around.

The paradise-like scenery of this world, which had been maintained until this moment, had lapsed into urgent chaos. Nevertheless, it wasn't a natural disaster like an earthquake that had caused the weather to change. To make an analogy—it was just like a virtual bug occurring on a game screen.

However, even under such abnormal circumstances, Mio and Reine still observed the situation with great calmness as they glanced towards each other.

“Reine, this is.”

“.....Ah, there's no mistake about it.”

“W-what is this.....”

When asked by Shidou, Reine replied while looking up at where the noise rang.

“.....Interference from the outside. This is likely—the Spirit Formula.”

“Spirit Formula.....?”

As Shinji asked while confused, Mio gave a small nod to reaffirm this.

“Un. 30 years ago, it was a technique that brought the existence known as Spirit—me into this world. A secret sorcery that gathered all of the unevenly distributed mana in this world into a single location in order to give birth to a supernatural existence. Someone who can do this.....as far as I know it could only be Westcott. Apparently, it seems that he is still alive.”

“Wha.....!?”

Shidou's voice began to shudder as he heard what Mio had just said.

“Creating.....a Spirit? Wait a moment, does that mean they are planning to create a new Spirit outside.....!? Moreover, a Spirit of Origin just like Mio!?”

As Shidou raised his voice to a scream, Mio and Reine nodded at the same time.

“.....Perhaps. And—it seems that Westcott is at the center of the flow of mana. It looks like he intends to use himself as the core for the Spirit Formula.”

“Westcott is becoming a Spirit.....!?”

Being told of the worst case scenario, Shidou instinctively made a sullen face. The goal that Westcott had spoken of in the future world flashed in his mind.

—Obtain the power of the Spirit of Origin and overwrite the world.

To be honest, he didn't comprehend what that meant when he first heard that. But now—after experiencing this space created by Mio, he could at last understand.

If Westcott had the same power to create this space and if this space grew large enough to cover the entire world—it would certainly merit the expression of overwriting the world.

He didn't know what kind of world Westcott would try to create. However, Westcott once said, “This is a revenge against mankind”. Then, in that world, it wouldn't be hard to imagine what would happen to people that weren't Magicians.

Speaking of a new world was good enough, but the essence of this goal was genocide. Naturally, this matter was unacceptable.

However, at that moment, Shinji frowned after strenuously thinking.

“Wait a moment. If he could do this, why didn't he do this earlier? If he could turn himself into a Spirit, why did he bother with trying to collect the Sephira Crystals from the other Spirits?”

Indeed, if the Spirit Formula that created Mio can be done once more, than this method would be much quicker.

Reine then placed her hand against her chest as she answered.

“.....It wouldn't have worked. He was still missing something needed to make the formula a success.”

“Something.....?”

“.....Thirty years ago, Westcott and the others choose the center of the Eurasia continent as the point for conducting the ceremony. That was because that location was a key point in the flow of mana—a so-called spiritual vein for magical and natural energy.”

Mio continued on as if inheriting the baton from Reine.

“I was born through the Spirit Formula. But at that time, all of the world’s accumulated mana from the spiritual vein was absorbed into me. “

“.....That’s why. In order to create another Spirit like me, you would have to wait for the world to form another huge spiritual vein. —But that would take waiting for hundreds, or perhaps even thousands of years.”

“So, why now—”

While asking, Shidou swayed his shoulders.

Perhaps noticing from that response, Reine gently nodded to him.

“.....Yes. The spiritual vein here is “me” —Westcott seems to have accumulated the mana through that means.”

“Un. <Goetia> seems to be equipped with the device used for the operation. The difference in precision is remarkable compared to 30 years ago. But that may be natural due to the invention of the Realizer Manifestation Device now.”

“What.....but that would mean.....”

“Ah. Needless to say, this would be impossible unless knowing prior when I will emerge. But right now—the impossible situation has now occurred.”

Hearing what Reine had said, Shidou gritted his teeth in silence.

It was unnecessary to think over this, the reason was—because Shidou traveled back in time.

His actions in trying to save everyone were now driving the world into an even greater dilemma. Faced with this reality, Shidou felt a sharp pain attack his heart.

However, having likely seen through Shidou’s thoughts, Reine continued on.

“.....You just wanted to save everyone from my hands. There’s no need for you to feel guilty. If this is the cause, then it is all my responsibility. —Besides, wouldn’t it waste more time to regret?”

Agreeing with that Reine had said, Mio turned her eyes to Shidou.

“Yeah. Please excuse me for being exploited by that type of person. But it’s even more despicable to change the world where I shared memories with Shin.”

After making a complex expression in silence for a while, Mio loosened her cheeks as if lost in thought before finally speaking up.

“.....Shidou, can you lend me your strength? It may be strange coming from the person who killed everyone in the future world—”

While saying that, Mio stared into Shidou’s eyes.

“—Let’s go together to help everyone.”

“.....! Ahh.....!”

Shidou gave a vigorous nod while responding back.

Surely it was a desperate situation. Westcott obtaining the powers of the Spirit of Origin was the worst possible development imaginable.

—However, after hearing that Mio would help everyone, Shidou was unable to contain his joy.

Mio smiled as she took a step closer to Shinji.

“Shin.”

“Ah.”

Shinji seemed to understand her intentions from that gesture alone. He spread out his hands to tightly embrace Mio.

“.....I’m heading back now.”

“.....Un, please be careful.”

After Shinji finished speaking, he turned his attention to Shidou.

“—Shidou. I’m entrusting Mio to you.”

“—Ah.”

Upon hearing what Shinji had requested, Shidou returned back with a nod.

Then, looking on at this scene, this time it was Reine extended out her hands just like Shinji.

“.....Shidou.”

“Huh? Eh.....”

As Shidou’s eyes wandered as if he was somewhat embarrassed, Reine moved her fingertips as if urging him to come closer.

“Ehh.....then, excuse me.”

“.....Un.”

After meeting his hesitation halfway, Reine gently hugged Shidou.

“.....Thank you for the best date. —If it is you, everything will be fine.”

“Reine-san.....”

Shidou murmured while returning back the hug.

For a moment, while closing their eyes, they could feel each other's heartbeat and body temperature.

By that alone, Shidou felt more strength entering his body than ever before.

“—Well, let's go, Shin.”

While saying that, Mio extended out her hand towards Shidou.

“—Oh!”

Shidou nodded once again while firmly grasping that hand.



—In the darken sky where the setting sun had already vanished into the horizon, a brilliant radiance still remained.

Like stars inlaid onto the night sky, the light swirled coiled and swirled as it converged onto a single point. A phantasmal sight as if coming from a dream. If one didn't know any better when gazing, surely it would undoubtedly be described as a God or perhaps an Angel.

However, the expression of the Spirits watching on from the exterior of <Fraxinus> was not one of awe or adoration—but rather a look of trepidation and irritation.

But such a response wasn't unwarranted. It wasn't a God at the center of the light, but the enemy of the Spirits, the magus Isaac Ray Pelham Westcott.

“Fu—hahahahaha! Hahahahahahaha!”

Westcott's loud laughter resounded through the night sky.

“Ku.....!”

Tohka gritted her teeth as she tightened her grip on <Sandalphon>, swinging the edge of her blade towards Westcott.

With a tremendous roar, the flash from the sword teared across the sky.

However, the slash, which could cleave open any solid impregnable fortress, dissolved into the air upon making contact with the light radiating from Westcott.

A blow exerted with strength from her entire body had failed to do anything. The sense of powerlessness from that was just like trying to attack Mio's Astral Dress. Tohka distorted her face in a startled fashion as she let out a groan.

“—It’s useless. My body is already imbued with reiryoku. Unlike your power which is only a fragment, mine has the same origin as <Deus>.”

Westcott spread out his hands in a playful manner as his body flew into the sky.

“No one can stop me anymore. Look here obediently—I have become a perfect Spirit. A sight that will smear change onto this world!”

“Don’t—screw around!”

Tohka swung down <Sandalphon> without abandoning hope. Each beheading strike ripped apart the air, holding enough formidable power for a certain kill.

Of course, it wasn’t just Tohka. The Yamai sisters and Yoshino released wind pressure and cold air towards Westcott. Mukuro opened a hole in space in an attempt to directly seal his power. Miku and Natsumi raised everyone’s power with a performance from <Gabriel>, which <Haniel> mimicked.

However, even with all that, Westcott remained unscathed. With a somewhat disappointed look, Westcott shrugged his shoulders.

“I really can’t understand this audience’s disobedience. —Ellen, Artemisia.”

Westcott spoke as he slowly as he raised his hand. A part of the light that was attached to his body danced in the sky like a meteor before being sucked into the chests of Ellen and Artemisia, both of whom were in the middle of fighting Origami and Mana.

The next moment, Ellen and Artemisia’s bodies emitted a radiant glow.

“! This is—”

“Wow, amazing. This power…….”

The two of them widened their eyes in surprise. In that instant, Origami and Mana, who were in the middle of confronting them, jumped backwards as if feeling something amiss.

“……!”

“Tch—”

However, Origami and Mana’s judgment wasn’t incomprehensible. If Tohka and the others were in the same position, they would have taken a similar action.

Clearly, there was an ominous aura surrounding both Ellen and Artemisia now. A dense power different than what they both had previously. —From the looks of it, they were given each a portion of Westcott’s power.

Looking at the current state of those two, Westcott distorted the edge of his lips in satisfaction.

“Just leave their eyes and ears so they can bear witness the end of this world. Since they are also Spirit, they won’t die from having their hands and feet cut off.”

“—Ha.”

“Wow, it sounds painful. But since it’s a Spirit—it can’t be helped.”

Having accepted Westcott’s command, Ellen and Artemisia dashed across the sky.

“—!?”

“Wha……!”

In an instant, Origami and Mana screamed as their bodies were repelled backwards. An instantaneous attack faster than what the eye could follow. Despite the two of them already having assumed a defensive stance, their weaponry and armored arm respectively were beautifully torn down.

“Origami! Mana!”

“—It’s just a matter of time, no need to be worried about the others now.”

As Tohka screamed their names, along with that voice, Artemisia’s shadow was closing in on her.

“Ku——!?”

Tohka hurriedly raised <Sandalphon> to parry the blow from the laser blade. However, despite this defense, the strong impact still struck Tohka’s body. Her stance was destroyed as she began rolling off the surface of the exterior.

“Fu——”

Artemisia would naturally never miss such a chance opportunity. She kicked off against the sky as she furthered her pursuit against Tohka.

“Ku……!”

Tohka steeled herself for the upcoming impact and pain.

The difference in power was clear at a glance. But somehow they had to stop Westcott. If he wasn’t stopped, the world where she met Shidou and the others would be changed into a form that he desired. Such a thing was absolutely unacceptable. Fortunately, it seemed that her opponent wasn’t focused on killing her. Then, even if she lost her hands or feet, she could still counterattack——!”

“……!?”

But at the moment Tohka was preparing for the inevitable, Artemisia, who had been close at hand, frowned and jumped backwards.

“Mu——!?”

Tohka raised her brow at the unexpected act—but then soon noticed immediately afterwards.

A crack appeared on the surface of the giant cocoon floating beside <Fraxinus>, as dazzling light began to leak out from inside. Perhaps, Artemisia had retreated due to being wary of that.

“This is——”

Just as Tohka said that, the cocoon all of sudden opened as two figures flew out from inside.

—Shidou and also Mio.

“Shidou!”

“Shidou-san.....!”

“Oh! You’re safe!”

The Spirits’ expressions brightened as they called out his name.

“Ah—I’ve kept you waiting, everyone.”

Shidou smiled a little awkwardly, and then he manifested the Angel <Sandalphon> in his hand while pointing it at Westcott.

“—Hey, Isaac Westcott. It looks like you’ve been doing whatever you want while we were away.”

Having jumped from inside <Ain Soph>’s cocoon, Shidou sharpened his gaze while directing the tip of <Sandalphon> towards Westcott.

With this body at the center, it was clear that there was dense reiryoku swirling around. The overwhelming pressure welcomed him just like when he confronted Mio. Just remembering that feeling produced the illusion of his skin breaking apart into dust.

Westcott smiled silently with a leisurely look, responding back to them while spreading out his hands.

“—Thanks for your help. I’m grateful to you, Itsuka Shidou. Thanks to the fact that you held off <Deus> until I began the formula. It was worth providing that valuable Sephira Crystal.”

“What did you say.....?”

Certainly, Nia’s Sephira Crystal, which Westcott once possessed, was currently in Kurumi’s hands and now also existed within Shidou’s body. But from the way he said it, perhaps all of it was part of his strategy as Westcott was anticipating for the future.

Of course, it could have been a bluff made to establish a physiological advantage. But Shidou judged it to be part of his scheme. Despite the basis for this judgement—there were no regrets, only a determination to do everything in order to break out from this situation.

Having likely guessed this from Shidou's expression and attitude, Westcott darkly smiled as if deriving pleasure from the depths of heart.

"That imposing vigor. Well, since you have all ten Sephira Crystals in your body and <Deus> is accompanying you, this should be expected. However—"

At that moment, Westcott gently lifted his chin. The strong radiance his body gave off—gradually transformed into a jet-black darkness.

"—Just a bit too late."

"Wha——.....!"

Even with his guard on alert, Shidou felt his breath begin to clog.

Floating behind Westcott, a huge "tree" had appeared.

A jet-black tree with branches that shaded the sky and roots that dredged towards the earth. It's epidermis resembled decaying rotten wood as it filled the air with an ominous feeling of suffocation.

The Demon King from nightmares emerged as if spreading despair to everyone who gazed at it.

"This is.....!"

"<Ain Soph>? No....."

"Demon, King——"

The Spirits looked up at the sky with a dumbfounded tone.

Like a conductor, Westcott waved his hands while declaring with an intoxicated expression.

"Come; let's create the world, <Belial> (Eternal Prison)."

In that instant, the jet-black tree began to squirm like the movements from a developing fetus. Its branches began to expand out to the horizon as its roots turned and pointed to the ground. At the same time, another landscape began to form in the sky around the huge tree.

".....!"

Everyone recognized this sight. It felt the same as the monochrome space created by <Ain Soph>—the sensation of the "neighboring world" gradually eroding this world.

—Don't leave "that" alone. This intuition crossed the minds of Shidou, Mana, and all of the Spirits.

Then, at that moment, a single cry echoed as if to respond to that.

"—<Ain Soph>."

At that moment, the cocoon floating behind Mio unfolded and transformed into the tree of light, <Ain Soph>.

<Ain Soph> extended out its branches and roots to entangled <Belial> in order to pin it down.

<Ain Soph> and <Belial> intertwined intricately, enveloping the surrounding area like a huge bird cage. The two worlds vying for development collided against each other, staining the surrounding scenery with noise.

“.....! Mio!”

“I used <Ain Soph> to suppress <Belial>.....but this won’t last long.

Everyone, please. Lend me your strength. In order to protect——this world where I meet Shin.”

“.....!”

As Mio spoke, all of the Spirits rounded their eyes in astonishment.

But that was to be expected. Since until just a moment ago, she was an adversary who everyone was risking their lives to fight against.

But before even that, she was also the gentle analytic officer who had been taking care of the Spirits. The Spirits weren’t trying to defeat her, but hoped instead to make her fall in love.

After being shocked for a second, the Spirits cheerfully nodded in consent as they re-prepared their respective Angels.

“Umu.....! I am happy to be able to fight together, Mio!”

“Yes. I’ll ask for more details about what happened in there later!”

“Hmm—I’m still not convinced though.”

Despite being the only one to let out a “humph!” sound from her nose, Kurumi seemed to have no objections in stopping Westcott. While making a cheeky expression, she switched out <Rasiel> with <Zafkiel>.

At that moment, among all of the people who were invigorated, Natsumi whispered with sweat dripping down her cheeks.

“.....No, but how can we lend our strength? Our attacks did nothing at all.....”

While lowering her head, Mio pressed her hands together as if in a devoted prayer.

“——There’s no such thing. Since aren’t your Angels not at full strength?”

At that moment, countless bands of light grew from Mio’s Astral Dress, each one of them piercing through the chests of the Spirits, as well as Shidou and Mana.

“Wha.....?”

The same sight seen in the future world, everyone couldn't help but stand breathless.

But—it was different. Rather than collapsing down, the Spirits who were pierced in the chest by Mio were brimming with reiryoku as a dazzling light covered their bodies.

“Ohhh.....!?”

“This is—”

As the voiced their surprise, the light gradually gained substance.

That's right. Glad in the absolute armor of the Spirits—a complete Astral Dress had manifested here.

Although they didn't manifest an Astral Dress, both Mana and Shidou were brimming with tremendous power just like Artemisia and Ellen.

“—Wow!? Seriously, Miochi?”

Such a voice echoed from behind. From the looks of it, Nia, who had been crouching on the exterior of <Fraxinus> in a plan to return back to the bridge, had manifested a nun-like Astral Dress.

“—After all, despite being a trace amount, there is still a Sephira Crystal in Nia's body. Using that as the medium, I was able to pour out my reiryoku to you.”

“Hya! Nice service! Alright DEM! Let me be your opponent!”

Nia, who had been making progress trying to escape, briskly stood up as she swiftly declared. Seeing that excessively prideful look from her, Shidou couldn't help but smile.

However, Mio continued to prompt for everyone's attention.

“In spite of this, the enemy is also a Spirit. In order to completely defeat this opponent, we'll have to gather all of the Angels together for a single blow.”

“All of the Angels.....together?”

“Eh.....in the presences of Ellen and the others, wouldn't coalescing all of our attacks be impossible?”

As Natsumi asked, Mio glanced towards Shidou.

“No, I would like everyone to help pave the way towards Westcott. —Don't we have it here. A person who can handle the power of all of the Angels alone.”

As if guided by Mio's voice, everyone's eyes gathered towards Shidou.

“Eh—?”

Shidou was momentarily stunned, but he soon understood the meaning behind those words as he nodded back in response to everyone's gaze.

If it had been the old Shidou, he would have been captured by fear and dismay.

But now he was wielding an Angel. And above all else, there were the Spirits.

And they represented more than just a reliable ally for Shidou.

—That's right. A man can't display an undignified response to a woman.

It was a frivolous reason and motive for confronting a formidable foe. But it seemed like a perfectly suitable manner for Shidou.

Shidou grinned as he raised his voice to make a declaration.

“Let's go everyone. —We'll save this world!”

“Ohh!”

The Spirits all responded to Shidou's command as they each kicked off the exterior of <Fraxinus> and rushed towards Westcott.

Their appearance was just like a shooting star. Several shadows danced in the night sky, leaving behind a glittering trail.

However, Westcott wouldn't just wait by silently. The squirming branches from <Belial> tried to shoot down the Spirits at a tremendous speed.

In addition to that—

“Did you really think—I would just let you go?”

“Don't imagine that you can get away.....!”

Artemisia and Ellen, both given power by Westcott, intercepted the Spirits. Their laser swords were weaved with a dense magic as they traversed in a speed faster than the human eye could follow.

Despite this, the Spirits who had regained their full strength wouldn't be killed so easily. Origami and Mana suppressed the DEM wizards as the rest of the Spirits used that opportunity to avoid the branches from <Belial>.

“Ha——!”

Strengthened by both <Zafkiel>'s First Bullet <Aleph> and the music from <Gabriel>, Tohka had already released <Halvanhelev> from <Sandalphon>. Meanwhile, Yoshino, who was riding on <Zadkiel> alongside <Natsumi>, had enlarged her Angel through <Haniel> while leading a charged assault clad in <Raphael>'s wind.

Kotori, who had her power released from <Michael>'s <Shifuru>, had transformed her <Camael> into <Megiddo> and fired with all of her might as the night sky turned bright red.

Multiple Angels combined together to release a violent assault.

Although Westcott defended himself with a wall of reiryoku from <Belial>, it could be seen that damage was gradually beginning to accumulate despite still remaining unscathed.

However, Westcott smiled pleasingly without revealing any frustration or dismay.

“Hmm. If that’s what your trying to do. Then—how about this?”

While speaking, he raised a single hand.

As if responding to that, a huge sphere appeared in the sky above Westcott’s head.

“..... This is—”

Gazing that sight, Shidou felt his throat instinctively tighten.

But that was to be expected. What appeared there was a figure resembling Mio’s Angel of death, <Ain Soph Aur>.

“—<Athiel> (Extreme Altair of Death)”

Following Westcott command, ripples began to form on the surface of the sphere like a flower bud beginning to bloom.

From that center, countless particles of darkness poured down towards the Spirits.

—Returning back to a few minutes ago.

On the outside armor of <Fraxinus>, Nia held <Rasiel> in her hands as she watched the Spirits leaped off into the distance.

“—So, what are you doing, Nia?”

After suddenly hearing the voice of the <Fraxinus> AI Maria from the communication device, Nia felt a jitter reach her shoulders as she made a bitter smile while scratching her head.

“Well.....Now that I think about it carefully, neither I nor <Rasiel> are suitable for battle. Besides, haven’t I always been in a non-combatant position? The <Bandersnatch> or a small fry <Wizard> would have been fine enough, but isn’t it difficult to abruptly have to play the final boss all of a sudden? Isn’t it a super high hurdle?”

“Ha.”

After hearing the tone in Nia’s voice, Maria let out an exasperated sigh.

‘To think such caustic words would come from such an authority. Merciful tears are leaking out.’

“Oh.....n-no, it’s not like that! If I go and just drag down everyone’s feet, then I won’t be able face them ever again.....”

While speaking, Nia fiddled two of her fingers with each other.

Then, Maria continued to let out another sigh.

“—It can’t be helped. Even though you’re a Spirit, there’s a need to increase our fighting strength even by a little. Please listen carefully to me now. With your help Nia, it’s possible for my parameters to now reach the next level.”

“Huh?”

Hearing what Maria had said, Nia widened her eyes in surprise.

—Despair rained down from the sky.

The grains of darkness released from the huge black flower <Athiel> poured down towards the Spirits like countless particles of drifting pollen.

“Everyone! Don’t come in contact with that.....!”

Shidou yelled so much that it felt like his throat was unraveling. Those dark particles were a representation of “death”. An irreconcilable killer that would snatch away the life of its target without question through mere contact.

The Spirits were also deeply aware of the threat. They didn’t attempt to rebound or defend as they quickly leaped out the way.

However, not everyone had escaped. Origami and Mana, who were fighting Artemisia and Ellen, were obstructed by their opponents and forced to make a delayed escape.

“Ku.....!”

“This, hindrance.....!”

Ellen and Artemisia, who were given a part of Westcott’s reiryoku wouldn’t be killed from contact with the particles of darkness. However, it was unknown if this was also true for Origami and Mana despite being given a portion of Mio’s power.

“Origami! Mana!”

“Ku—<Ain Soph Aur>.....!”

Mio tried to summon <Ain Soph Aur> in an attempt to counteract <Athiel>.

However, it was already too late. The grains of darkness from <Athiel> were already closing in on Origami and Mana like a thin blanket of snow.

However—at that moment.

“Huh.....?”

The moment after Shidou blinked, countless white shadows covered his field of vision.

He thought it was a hallucination for a moment, but this was different.

Suddenly, countless girls with the same face appeared to protect Origami and Mana from the particles of darkness.

“Wha—!?”

Of course, those dark particles were a cluster of death. All of the girls who had come in contact with it lost their lives in an instant.

“No way, this is—”

Shidou raised his eyes and brow at this sight. The reason was simple. This bizarre scene felt oddly familiar.

Then, as if to immediately respond to Shidou’s surprise, a voice rang from behind.

“Ya— what a thread hanging situation we got here boys and girls! But it’s okay, Nia-chan has arrived so there's no need to worry anymore!”

“It's hard to understand how that boastful mouth still operates even in this type of situation.”

Shidou turned around as if recognizing that voice, and there he saw silhouette of a Spirit.

“Nia! And——”

But, in the middle of his words, he stopped. Next to Nia was another person, a girl who looked unfamiliar.

Lightly colored hair, dressed in a simple white Astral Dress. A cute but somewhat haughty face, features that made him think of the pseudo Spirit <Nibelcol>.

However, he remembered the voice he heard. Shidou doubtfully continued.

"No way, Maria?"

“Yes. Everyone has outdone themselves. I have been waiting so long to have a real body, a totally perfect Maria.”

Maria said so while making poses like a clichéd idol from the past. Seeing that bright look coming from her at the wrong time, Shidou laughed miserably.

“But, what happened after all? The person who saved Origami's group was also Maria..... right? They——look like <Nibelcol>.”

As Shidou asked, Maria nodded and replied back.

“That feeling is not wrong. <Nibelcol> is the pseudo Spirit created from the power of <Beelzebub> and DEM's Realizer. If so——when we have <Rasiel>, the fact that <Ratatoskr> can do the same thing is also reasonable.”

Then Maria raised her hand. Immediately, many of the pages from <Rasiel> that Nia was holding flew up, and from there the silhouette of the girls that resemble Maria appeared.

“Of course, individuals subsiding to the power of <Athiel> will not be able to regenerate.”

“But with this body, I can protect everyone for a few minutes.”

“Even if I die, only Nia's Spirit Power is consumed.”

“As long as we are not the original body, the damage will not be considerable.”

Countless Maria's jokingly spoke as they danced in the air, before heading towards <Athiel>.

Correspondingly, Nia raised her index finger and pointed towards <Athiel>.

“Go, Maria. I choose you.”

“Maria does not listen to you.”

“Ata!?”

The Maria remaining by her side jabbed at her flank, causing Nia's body to bend back in a < like shape.



As Maria cheerfully sighed, she then turned to Shidou with a more serious look.

“Well, leave <Athiel> here to me. Go on and settle this matter.”

Maria patted his back as she advised him to move forward.

“.....Ah!”

As Shidou vigorously nodded back, he kicked off against the sky and headed towards the center of the chaos—towards Westcott.

Of course, Ellen and Artemisia, who noticed his movements, tried to stop him alongside the countless branches of <Belial> that were squirming like tentacles.

However—

“Haaaaaaaaah!”

“<Zadkiel>.....!”

“I won’t let you—obstruct Shidou-san!”

The Spirits lined up around him deflected back the Wizard’s laser swords and dispelled the incoming branches in order to clear a pathway.

For a moment, a brief second, the path towards Westcott was visible.

But for Shidou right now, a brief moment was more than enough.

“Fu——!”

While clad in <Raphael>’s wind, he dashed across the sky like a bullet.

As Shidou passed through the sparks of conflict between the Spirits and Wizards, he found that his mind was strangely calm.

As if this moment was being stretched out in time.

With that, one by one, he connected every Sephira Crystal within his body—calling out the name of each respective Angel.

<Metatron>.

<Rasiel>.

<Zafkiel>.

<Zadkiel>.

<Camael>.

<Michael>.

<Haniel>.

<Raphael>.

<Gabriel>.

And finally——<Sandalphon>.

In order to defeat the primordial Demon King, not even the slightest hint of confusion was permitted. He had to assemble all ten Angels dwelling in his body into a single image.

Eventually, a single ray of light wrapped around Shidou's arm.

“Itsuka Shidou——”

Westcott widened his eyes.

But rather than a look of astonishment or fear——there was unmistakable joy and excitement mixed within his expression.

However, no matter what exactly, the thing that needed to be done did not change.

Shidou channeled all of his strength into his fist——

‘Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh——!’”

——To smash against the Magician who began everything.

“.....!”

——The tremors reached Mio's entire body.

Despite that, it was neither because <Ain Soph> lost to <Belial> nor was it caused by an enemy attack.

In the center of the sky, Shidou had used the power of the Angels to strike down Westcott, who was floating between his two Demon Kings.

The tremendous shockwave transmitted through the air, echoing in the huge birdcage formed by <Belial> and <Ain Soph>. While scattered around the surroundings, the Spirits all hastily looked towards Shidou's direction in alarm.

“——Ga——, ha——”

At the same time Westcott let out an anguished cry, the huge tree standing behind him and the overlooking flower above both let out a dull sound. The space fought against with <Ain Soph> had begun to distort and collapse.

—Fallen leaves. Cracks emerged everywhere on the invincible Demon King.

However, that was to be expected. In any case, it was a devastating blow containing the power of all ten Angels along with Mio's own power. Although Westcott had possessed the power of the Spirit of Origin, it was impossible to handle that lightly.

“——”

Shidou gripped his bleeding fist and raised it to sky to show everyone of his victory.

“Ohh.....!”

“Shidou!”

“Kyaaaa! Daaaarling!”

“.....Fu.”

From every direction, the voices from the Spirits echoed around. Mio breathed a small sigh of relief, feeling that the burden from <Ain Soph> had lessened.

However——

“Fu.....haha——ha, haha, amazing——Itsuka Shidou. But——you were just one step short.”

“Wha——!?”

Shidou's shoulders began to tremble as he heard Westcott's voice coming from up front.

With his entire body thrown from the shock, blood was profusely bleeding from both his mouth and nose. While in the abyss of this ecstasy, Westcott called out one more name from the depths his throat.

“——<Qemetiel>——”

“——”

At that moment.

A chill struck Mio's entire body.

But that was natural, since it was Mio who understood the horrific power of this Demon King the most.

As Westcott called out that name, a torrent of mana surrounded his body like a storm.

—Despite his critical injuries, the final Demon King was still manifesting. In such a state, it was doubtful that even Westcott could still fully control that Demon King.

—In the blink of an eye, she quickly tried to think of plan. The powers she possessed, the Angels within Shidou, assistance from the Spirits, anything that could possibly reverse this situation. —Thinking thoroughly of a way to keep Shidou safe and sound.

Pondering it over, it's been a long time since she last felt this feeling. 30 years ago, it was the same thought process felt when standing in front of Shinji's corpse.

But it was a bit different. At that time, there was only despair in her heart. But—right now, Shidou was still alive. There was still something that could be done. But what needed to be done? What—

At that moment, while looking at Shidou's back, the memories from that moment spread through her mind.

The memories of the future shared through the pathway by Shidou flashed in her mind.

History before Shidou traveled back in time. A world just before the realization of her goal.

Through Shidou's memories, Mio caught a glimpse of her own future.

However, even when it was clear that she could get back Shinji, she—didn't look fulfilled at all.

“——”

Ah, this way.

The answer—perhaps was already shown.

“Wha.....!”

In the sky, Shidou's eyes opened in horror.

A dreadful chill ran across his body. It felt as if the ambient temperature suddenly dropped for a moment.

That feeling was very familiar. Memories of the future world flowed back. The last Angel Mio used, when Tohka retrieved Mio's power and approached Mio.—The void Angel that returned everything to zero.

Just within Shidou's predictions, darkness gathered in front of Westcott and formed the shape of a seed.

The light that surrounded Mio when she summoned it before made it hard to see the whole picture, but apparently its natural shape was a resemblance of this thing. A strange feeling filled his heart.

At the same time of realization, Shidou tried to escape. But, for a moment—as if he was bound by that little seed, his body could not move.

“Ah——”

The intuition of death. If he jumps back, the immediate space will be erased.

“——!”

“.....!”

From behind, he knew that the Spirits were screaming. However, he could not recognize the contents.

As they were doing so, the black seed as if germinating, spreading darkness out into the area.

“Ah——”

Shidou exclaimed, trying not to get engulfed by darkness——

“——No you can’t, Shidou. Because, those children are still waiting for you.”

The next moment, with that voice, he was pulled back.

“It took a second for him to realize. The branches of <Ain Soph> reached from far behind, and coiled over his belly.

And, as if tagging out Shidou, a single Spirit confronted Westcott.

——It was Mio.

“Mio.....!? What are you doing!?”

Shidou shouted before he could feel relieved of getting saved.

Immediately Mio turned to look at Shidou as she spoke.

“——The reiryoku is out of control. If you leave it be, it will blow up the whole area around here. That said, the consequences will not stop at the level of the Eurasian catastrophe.——But, if I use <Ain> to equalize them so that they cancel out each other, maybe——”

“What——”

At Mio's words, Shidou felt like his heart was crushed.

From that voice, from Mio's expression, he could already guess the meaning behind those words.

“What are you talking about! If you do that, you will——!”

“ ”

Mio did not respond. Shidou continued to scream out loud.

"Do not joke around with me Why! Hadn't Shinji said that? That he wanted to let Mio see more of the world——! Even so, why——"

Shidou yelled, reaching out to stop Mio. Although his hands were unable to reach Mio, it was just enough to grasp the tip of Astral Dress.

But, at that moment, the part that Shidou touched, vanished into thin air while giving out specks of light.

As if, when reiryoku was sealed.

“_____!”

As Shido felt suffocated, Mio loosened her lips.

“——Shidou. You are really a great man. I love you.”

And as she said so, she winked as if this was only a joke.

“——However, you are still Shin's next life huh?”

Mio smiled gently, and then returned to face Westcott.

At the same time, Shidou's body was pulled back by the branches of <Ain Soph>.

No, not just Shidou. The other Spirits along with Mana, also got pulled away by countless branches.

As <Ain Soph> pulled everyone away, it gradually changed its gigantic form, just like before when it wrapped around Mio and Shidou, it then covered itself around Shidou and <Fraxinus>.

Perhaps——this was to protect Shidou's group, from the aftermath of the impact between Angel and Demon King.

“——Miooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo——!”

Shidou, towards the night sky that was slowly fully obscured by <Ain Soph>, screamed that name as she got farther and farther away.



At the center of the swirling flow of mana——The Spirit•Mio and the Magus•Isaac Westcott faced each other.

As Westcott noticed Mio's silhouette, he did not mind to wipe the blood around his mouth and instead just gave a smirk.

“.....<Deus> huh. What an absolute luxurious substitution you are. Even though for me, I just want to delete Itsuka Shidou right now.”

Mio closed her eyes while listening to those words, and she responded as if whispering to herself.

“Surely, both of us will not exist in the future world as of now. Neither you, nor I.——Isn't the moment just so perfect? I can deal with all the nuisances all at once.”

“Hah, hah, hah——”

As Westcott's shoulder shuddered, he placed his hand on his forehead and raised his face to the sky.

“——Where? Where did I go wrong? Even when I have excavated the secrets of magic and got my hands on the Spirit Formula. Even when I have created the Realizer.——Even now, I'm holding the power of the Spirit of Origin in my hands.”

Mio gently narrowed her eyes at Westcott's words

“.....From the beginning, I (Spirit) should not have been born. The same goes for the Realizer. This power is too far beyond human capacity. But, ah——right, other than that, if this is also the cause of your misery——”

Mio sighed, putting her hand on her chin and said.

“——You, were never the sort of person I would choose.”

“——”

As the words got into his ears, Westcott rounded his eyes for a moment as if shocked.

“.....Ha, haha, hahahahahahahahahahahah——”

Soon after, with a look as if he couldn't bear it anymore, he started laughing.

“I see, I see.....then there is no other way.”

Westcott staggered as if he was tired of laughing. Then, he slowly raised his right hand to the front.

“——<Qemetiel>”

As responded to those words, black seed appeared in front of him and began to leak out darkness.

Mio also raised her hand in the same way and called up the name of the last Angel.

“——<Ain>”

A moment after——the forces of <void>and <void> collided against each other.



——Her body began melting into the world.

A strange feeling wrapped around Mio.

There was no pain. Nor fear. It just felt as if her consciousness was gradually sipping away. The last and most powerful Angel, collided with the Demon King that possessed equivalent power. The users definitely would not be safe.

But——she did not regret.

If Mio did not activate <Ain> at that time, Shidou and the Spirits around him that were swept into Westcott's uncontrollable power would surely die.

No——on the contrary, it would be no surprise if an explosion larger than the Eurasian catastrophe struck upon the world.

When she thought about it, she unexpectedly smiled at her motives.

To feed her own desires, she sacrificed the girls, sacrificed the world, but did not expect to be waiting for her last moments with such a reason.

However, she could not bear it.

——Once again to see Shin die before her very eyes.

Moreover——

(.....Shidou——)

The words they exchanged while in <Ain Soph>. The words he spoke came back in her mind. At that moment, Mio herself realized.——She still had another wish.

No matter what she had done, she could not entirely bring Shin back.

If so then at least Mio's last wish——was to go with Shin to the end of the road here.

(——I'm sorry, everyone——)

Mio whispered as her consciousness slowly faded away.

She had killed so many people.

She had made so many people miserable.

She did not expect herself to be forgiven, nor did she think that she would be forgiven.

Absolute evil, the worst catastrophe of human history. It was herself.

Strange——that this feeling alone was not a lie.

As the last remaining part of her consciousness began to disappear——

——Mio.

(.....!)

In that moment.

As a voice came from somewhere, Mio's closed eyes opened.

Not just because she was suddenly called.

Because it was——the voice she had always been yearning to hear again for over 30 years.

(Shin——)

——Ah, I'm sorry, Mio. I've let you wait for so long.

Mio called up that name, from the light a dim figure appeared.

(A, ah——)

Mio felt her tears coming out.

Perhaps this was only the hallucination Mio saw when her consciousness was gradually dissipating. Perhaps this was only the illusion she could hear in her critical state.

Even so, that was certainly——the silhouette of the lover she had yearned for such a long, long time.

(Shin——, Shin.....!)

Mio tried hard to reach out, hugging Shin's body tightly.

A warm feeling wrapped her body. Mio buried her face in his chest, and screamed inaudibly.

——Thirty years.

I have always, always wandered around looking for you.

I have relied so much on your memories to keep going.

Even though you were always——so close to me like this.....!

——Mio. I have always, always wanted to see you.

Shin also hugged Mio back.

(Me too——I have always wanted to see you——)

Mio would not give up, putting more strength to the arms that were hugging Shin.

We will never separate again.

I will——never ever let you go.

——From now on, let us always be together.

(Un.....!)

Mio smiled with tears——and disappeared from this world.

Final Chapter: A Hand Stretched Out

The boundary between living and death is terribly ambiguous, depending on the judgement of each person to determine when death has arrived.

Some people regarded death as when cardiopulmonary functions cease, while others say that it is after the demise of all brain functions. Some people say that even if there was consciousness remaining, it was not necessary what the raw body contains as long as the heart of the person remains—then should be some form of existence left. Well, the last one might feel like escapist sentiments rather than a real definition.

In an empty field of vision, Isaac · Westcott was idly thinking about such a matters. —If so, he wondered if he could still be considered living now?

At the very least, cardiopulmonary functions had stopped. It was natural since the majority of his body had already disappeared. Although there was still some conscious thought left, it was uncertain if even his brain had retained its shape. He was just lying on the ground, watching the sky while waiting for his consciousness to stop—

And so, while these thoughts still lingered, Westcott sneered at himself.

Between people being alive or dead, he should be regarded as dead since a long time ago.

Yes, as a human, Isaac Westcott was already dead. What remained here was a wreckage of a pathetic Spirit barely retaining its existence through its reiryoku. His lingering consciousness was proof of having become such a form.

A force of annihilation between an Angel and Demon King. Being involved at such a close range, this result was natural. There was no indication of <Deus> remaining. It seemed that she had disappeared a little earlier than Westcott.

The truly loathing feeling of having been rejected in a double suicide, with that in mind Westcott laughed again. Despite not knowing it himself, his facial features were still distorted in the shape of a smile.

However, it was only a matter of time. Even as a Spirit, he wouldn't last much longer. Indeed, his consciousness began to dozy off as the pull of the Shinigami's hand grew closer.

However—

“—Ike!”

At that moment, as if to bring back Westcott's consciousness, such a voice resounded.

From the looks of it, Ellen had rushed over with a ghastly pale expression on her face. It seemed that she was safe.

“Hi.....Ellen”

“Ah, Ike—those.....! We have to head for the medical Realizer immediately—”

Ellen suddenly stopped speaking. Perhaps while covering the voluntary territory to transport Westcott, she had realized it was too late even with the medical Realizer device.

“A-ahh.....”

Ellen powerlessly fell to the ground.

Then, as if to match that action—

“.....Ike.”

Another voice had come calling Westcott’s name.

It was voice deeper than Ellen. Nonetheless, Westcott soon recognized the person—since besides Ellen, there was only one other person who called Westcott by that nickname.

“.....Ah, Elliot”

As Westcott responded, at the edge of his sight, a man who was on a wheelchair and a women resembling Ellen had appeared.

Elliot Woodman and Karen Mathers. The founders of <Ratatoskr> and former compatriots of Westcott.

“.....!”

Ellen raised her face and glared angrily at Woodman and Karen. It couldn’t be helped.

Ellen’s grudge against Woodman was different from anyone else. It was enough to be pleased to speak of wanting to kill him. However, Ellen did not sprout curses or leap to attack him. While gritting with the back of her teeth, she instead began to beg.

“Please—Elliot.....Ike.....help Ike. If it is you then it is possible right? I will do anything—I’ll listen to whatever you say—please.”

“.....”

Seeing Ellen’s tearful appeal, Woodman quietly casted his eyes downward. It was neither a refusal nor an act of malice. Simply—there was nobody in the world who could prevent Westcott from dying now.

“Ahh.....”

Ellen’s voice was trembling while she shedded tears. Seeing her sister like that, Karen gave a slight heartbreaking look.

“Fu, fu.....what a bother. Did you come to laugh at me, Elliot?”

“.....I came here to see my friend’s death. It that such a funny story, Ike?”

As Westcott inquired in a hoarse voice, Woodman quietly responded.

“Oh.....that’s right. That was a silly question. Even if the methods were different, you are certainly my friend——besides.”

Westcott distorted his lips to tell a joke.

“——We’re fellow comrades who were denied by the same woman.”

“——”

Hearing what Westcott had said, Woodman stared blankly for a moment before letting out an abrupt sigh.

“Haha.....for sure.”

“Fu—fu.”

Westcott smiled a little as his vision of the world began to blur again.

Ellen, Karen, Woodman.

Sworn friends who had their hometown burned and vowed for vengeance together, Westcott’s oldest comrades. Such uniform gazes at Westcott, expressing intentions of sorrow.

(—Ah—)

Westcott remembered a strange feeling.

Memories of his childhood, of when his mother was placed and buried in a coffin. ——From his mother’s perspective, the sensation of everyone’s gazes gathering for the funeral service.

Ellen was crying, Karen was looking down, and Woodman was quietly looking here. Different shapes, but there was sadness and mourning filled with despair.

The looks of his friends, and the fact that he was the one who molded these facial expressions——the fact that he was at the center of this despair.

——For Westcott, it was comfortable and irresistible.

(.....What.....it was so simple.....wasn’t it.....)

Magician Isaac · Westcott, with ecstatic excitement, slowly closed his eyes.



“——Shidou! Are you alright, Shidou!”

“Uh.....ah.....”

As his body was being rocked violently, he gradually opened his eyelids.

Apparently, he seemed to have lost consciousness. As his vague consciousness gradually awakened, the surrounding scenery and his current circumstances began to form a real image.

First of all, Tohka had been shaking his body. With a worried look, she had been calling out Shidou’s name numerous times.

No, she wasn’t alone. Several Spirits had gathered around with Shidou at the center.

Origami, Kotori, Yoshino, Kaguya, Yuzuru, Miku, Natsumi, Nia, Mukuro—and even also Kurumi. Looking behind, he also recognized that Mana and Maria were also here.

And here, Shidou was lying down on a costal beach at nighttime. The sky was filled with flickering stars as the faint sounds of waves were heard. It was a very romantic location. Why was he at such a place?

“——”

As he began to recognize his surroundings, Shidou sprung back up like a spring-loaded toy. He ignored the dull pain striking his body as he surveyed around to look at everyone’s faces.

“! Shidou!”

“Mun.....you finally woke up. I was worried.”

“Relief. Kaguya was barking and crying into Shidou’s chest in worry.”

“I have done no such thing yet?!”

Looking at the newly awakened Shidou, the Spirits all breathed out a uniform sigh of relief.

However, there was not time to return that response. Right now, there was only one thing on Shidou’s mind. He placed his hand clinging onto Tohka’s shoulder for support.

“Tohka. Mio is——”

“.....”

Hearing Shidou’s words, Tohka held her breath.

Rather than words, it was an eloquent silence. That alone—was enough to tell everything.

“Oh.....I see.”

Shidou helplessly lowered his hand.

A tremendous sense of powerlessness tormented his entire body.

He had tried every possible idea. Everyone had lent their strength and risked their lives.

But in the new future he grasped—Mio was gone.

That reality weighed on Shidou's mind remorselessly.

However, Shidou endured to push back the tears before they could spill as he took in a small breath.

“Ah.....I'm shaken. Shin is better than me.”

Hearing what Shidou had said, the Spirits after a momentary shock, let out bitter smiles.

“Oh.....well, then it can't be helped. As a rare playboy, how could your teeth stand before a pure love couple?”

Kotori spoke while rubbing her swollen red eyes. Shidou could only shrug his shoulders accordingly.

But then—at that moment.

In the completely darken sky, a small flickering light slowly swayed and fell down.

“Huh—?”

Shidou raised his eyes widely at the sight.

Then, as if the light was led to Shidou, it slowly came down in front of everyone.

“This is.....”

After seeing it, Shidou's expression was dyed by a color of shock.

Nonetheless, the responses from all of the Spirits were all the same. Everyone who acknowledged the source of that light was staring in astonishment.

But there was nothing that can be done. After all, what floated there was a gem-like object radiating various colors—a Sephira Crystal.

—Above it was a stuffed bear plushy with numerous bruises.

At the moment Shidou recognized it, the stuffed bear slid down from the Sephira Crystal. In that instant, Shidou caught it in his hands.

No doubt. It was the stuffed toy that Reine always had on herself.

No—not only that. The current Shidou could also understand. The stuffed bear was a present to Mio from Shinji over 30 years ago.

For the past thirty years, it was a meritorious object supporting Mio's heart from behind the scenes. Surely, Mio didn't want to erase herself together with such a prized object, so she must have left it behind for Shidou.

The stuffed animal had seen the test of time. There were traces of repairs done throughout its entire body, with patches of different colors marking the damaged areas.

With Mio's power, it would have been easier to repair the damages. But it seemed that she had bothered to do all of the repairs completely by hand.

Probably—she couldn't bear to do it. If she had restored it completely, it would have felt like a different stuffed bear than the one she got from Shinji—

“—Ah——”

At the moment he recognized this, tears began to overflow from Shidou's eyes.

“Ah.....ah——”

Despite not wanting to let everyone worry, the emotions he kept pushing back until now reached its limit and came overflowing back without pause.

With a trembling voice, Shidou broke down while holding the stuffed toy.

“.....Mio.....Mi——o.....!”

A gentle—but also sorrowful girl.

Created in a distorted manner, caught in a conflict without knowing anything—having committed a crime that she couldn't atone for.

A lifetime by no means able to achieve peace—

“You.....were able to meet with Shin, right?”

With a broken voice, Shidou raised his tear-covered face once again.

Then, as if responding to that, the Sephira Crystal shinning a rainbow-color light swayed slightly—melting and disappearing in the air.

“Mio.....”

But——at that time.

“——Eh?”

Shidou blurted out in shock.

Mio's Sephira Crystal had disappeared.

Suddenly, someone reached out and grabbed it.

At the unexpected situation, Shidou was breathless, and he immediately looked to the owner of that hand.

“What——”

And, he lost his words for a moment.

The identity of the person, who was taking a hold at Mio's Sephira Crystal, was just truly beyond imagination.

“Toh, ka?”

That's right.

In the midst of everyone's amazement, the one who stretched out her hand was——Tohka.

“——Sorry, but I'll be taking this.”

As Tohka said that, she then pulled the Sephira crystal closer and pressed it against her chest.

Immediately, Mio's Sephira Crystal sank into Tohka's chest, just like when Kurumi received Nia's Sephira Crystal.

“Tohka, what——”

The moment Shidou was still talking.

——The world, was covered by light.

Afterword

Long time no see, this is Tachibana Kōshi.

Date A Live 19 Mio True End has been sent out. What do you think? It would be great if everyone liked it. As with volume 17 and 18, it has been a parade of scenes I've wanted to write, so it has been extraordinarily fun writing.

While writing the daily life scenes, I once again realized the significance of the late debut characters like Miku, Natsumi, Nia, and Mukuro. Besides being able to generate topics of conversations as well, their involvement has made the initial debut characters shine even more. I can't imagine the daily routine without them.

I've also give thought about the daily routine Mio would have had spent with everyone had she been an ordinary Spirit. Because the roots are pure, she may have gotten along very well with Tohka and Mukuro. She would be vigilant in order to not be deceived by Miku, moreover, since she can do anything, Nia would seemingly rely on her. Of course, the collection of Shidou's personal information would not be inferior to either Kotori or Origami. Let's stop the topic here for now, since my other crying personality is almost ready to come out at this time writing this.

This volume has been released simultaneously with Higashide Yuichiro-sensei's Date A Bullet 4, so it would be even better if you've read it together. Summer! Sea! War! As you roll down the volume, you'll find the crackling sound of P glistening even more increasingly.

In addition, the new anime series is steadily being prepared, so stay tuned!

Now then, once again this publication has been successfully completed thanks to the cooperation of many parties. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to Tsuneko-sensei for designs, Editor-san, and everyone involved in editing, sales, distribution, etc, and also you for holding this book at this time.

In a sense, the story of Date A Live is also the love story of Takamiya Mio.

But that alone is not the end. I'm glad to be around with all of you for a little bit longer.

Well, let's meet again in the next volume

July 2018 Tachibana Kōshi